

**Value Co-creation trajectories of Customer Solutions: The
Influence of low customer readiness and Arabian business
culture**

Samer Hamadneh

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Heriot-Watt University

School of Social Sciences

September 2019

The copyright in this thesis is owned by the author. Any quotation from this thesis or use of any of the information contained in it must acknowledge this thesis as the source of the quotation or information.

ABSTRACT

Customer solutions involve a combination of the supplier and customer processes and resources whereby both parties engage in co-creation activities to create customer value in-use. Extant solutions marketing studies tend to focus on high customer readiness markets (HCRMs), assuming that customers are always able to effectively apply their resources and perform their roles in the co-creation process. However, while these studies suggest that achieving effective value co-creation processes and successful customer solutions depends largely on customer readiness, researchers have given little attention to understand the nature of the value co-creation process in low customer readiness markets (LCRMs). Also, there has been little investigation of how unique cultural contexts affect the customer solutions process. This research addresses these gaps in literature and aims at developing a better understanding of value co-creation trajectories within business to business (B2B) customer solutions in LCRMs and identifying the impact of Arabian business culture on the customer solutions process.

This research adopts an interpretive perspective and conducts 44 in-depth interviews with customers and providers of technology-based solutions originated in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector in Jordan. The study makes theoretical and practical contributions. It makes a theoretical contribution to solutions marketing literature by suggesting an extension to the known customer solutions process by proposing the market development phase to increase customer readiness to operate within solutions markets. In addition, the study shows that Arabian business practices including the use of personal connections, buyers' treatment of time and the involvement of senior supplier firms influence solution co-creation initiation. Moreover, the study offers empirical evidence into how a solutions value proposition is communicated in the ICT solutions sector, suggesting that providers need to combine both strategic and transactional selling approaches when communicating the value of their solutions offerings. Finally, the study integrates the emerging concept of value diminution into the complex practice of customer solutions and identifies some customer and supplier practices that lead to experience negative value co-creation outcomes. From a practical perspective, the findings from a non-western solutions market provide important implications for international and local solutions providers operating within the ICT solutions sector in Arabian markets.

DEDICATION

*This thesis is dedicated to my parents and my
loving wife*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am thankful to almighty Allah for giving me the blessings to do a PhD and the patience to finish this journey.

I am also sincerely and heartily grateful to my supervisors Dr Nigel Caldwell and Professor Babak Taheri for their guidance, encouragement and inspiration throughout my PhD study. This dissertation would have not been possible without your continuous support. Thank you for your patience with me and guiding me on every step of my journey.

My thanks also go to Dr Abhijeet Ghadge (Cranfield University) who supervised my studies at the early stages of the journey. Thank you for your motivation which helped me to get back on my feet at several points at the beginning of the journey.

I would like also to express my thanks to my fellow PhD colleagues at the School of Social Sciences at Heriot-Watt University. A special thanks go to whom I shared the office with, particularly I thank Naushad, Anthony, Berna, Yaifa, Mayah, Yujia and Mina.

I am truly indebted and thankful to the University of Jordan for sponsoring my doctoral studies. Special thanks go to my colleagues at the University of Jordan Business School particularly the marketing department.

I would also like to thank all the people who kindly gave up their time to be interviewed for this study.

Finally, I am grateful to my family, friends and wife Olga for their continued support and encouragement to complete this study.

ACADEMIC REGISTRY

Research Thesis Submission

Name:	Samer Hamadneh		
School/PGI:	School of Social Sciences (SOSS)		
Version: <i>(i.e. First, Re-submission, Final)</i>	Final	Degree Sought (Award and Subject area)	PhD, Management (Marketing)

Declaration

In accordance with the appropriate regulations, I hereby submit my thesis and I declare that:

- 1) the thesis embodies the results of my own work and has been composed by myself
- 2) where appropriate, I have made acknowledgment of the work of others and have made reference to work carried out in collaboration with other persons
- 3) the thesis is the correct version of the thesis for submission and is the same version as any electronic versions submitted*.
- 4) my thesis for the award referred to, deposited in the Heriot-Watt University Library, should be made available for loan or photocopying and be available via the Institutional Repository, subject to such conditions as the Librarian may require
- 5) I understand that as a student of the University I am required to abide by the Regulations of the University and to conform to its discipline.

* Please note that it is the responsibility of the candidate to ensure that the correct version of the thesis is submitted.

Signature of Candidate:		Date:	
--------------------------------	--	--------------	--

Submission

Submitted By <i>(name in capitals):</i>	
Signature of Individual Submitting:	
Date Submitted:	

For Completion in the Student Service Centre (SSC)

Received in the SSC by <i>(name in capitals):</i>			
Method of Submission <i>(Handed into SSC; posted through internal/external mail):</i>			
E-thesis Submitted (mandatory for final theses)			
Signature:		Date	

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1	Introduction of chapter	1
1.2	Rational for the Research	1
1.3	Research Aim and Questions	5
1.4	Originality of Study	6
1.5	Research Design	7
1.6	Outline of Chapters	9
1.7	Chapter Summary	11
2	Chapter 2: Theoretical Underpinning and Customer Solutions.....	12
2.1	Introduction	12
2.2	Section One: Service Dominant Logic of Marketing	13
2.2.1	Goods Dominant Logic of Marketing	13
2.2.2	Emerging the New Paradigm Shift “S-D” logic	16
2.2.3	Service Dominant Logic View of Value	19
2.2.4	The Concept of Value Co-Creation	21
2.2.5	Value Co-Destruction.....	24
2.3	Section Two: Customer Solutions Concept.....	27
2.3.1	Product Bundling	28
2.3.2	Systems Selling	29
2.3.3	Evolving the Customer Solutions Concept	30
2.3.4	Drivers and Outcomes of Customer Solutions.....	38
2.3.5	Research Streams of Customer Solutions Topic and the Focus of this Study	42
2.4	Section Three: Solutions Marketing	44
2.4.1	Relational View of Customer Solutions.....	45
2.4.2	Extending the Value Co-Creation Phases of Customer Solutions	48
2.4.3	The Buying Centre and Customer Solutions.....	53
2.4.4	Solutions Marketing Research Gaps and Research Questions’ Development	55

2.5	Chapter Summary	66
3	Chapter 3: Research Context	67
3.1	Introduction	67
3.2	Why research context is important?	67
3.3	The Arab culture.....	69
3.4	Arabian Business culture	70
3.5	Jordan	72
3.6	Chapter Summary	74
4	Chapter 4: Research Philosophy and Methodology.....	75
4.1	Introduction	75
4.2	Research aim and questions	75
4.3	Philosophical issues.....	76
4.3.1	Ontological considerations.....	77
4.3.2	Epistemological considerations.....	78
4.3.3	Epistemological stance adopted in this study: Inteprevistisim	79
4.4	Research approaches	81
4.4.1	Deduction versus Induction reasoning.....	82
4.4.2	Abduction approach	82
4.4.3	Selected approach: Inductive reasoning.....	83
4.5	Research design: Qualitative research.....	84
4.6	Methodological Approach: Purposeful Sampling Inquiry	85
4.7	Interviewing strategy: Semi-structured	87
4.8	Data Collection Process.....	89
4.8.1	Pilot study	89
4.8.2	Access and sample selection	90
4.8.3	Main data collection	93
4.9	Procedures relating to transcription and translation	102
4.10	Data Analysis	103
4.10.1	Template Analysis – Rationale	105
4.10.2	NVivo software	106
4.10.3	Template Analysis (Procedures)	107
4.10.4	Research Quality and Credibility	109

4.11	Research Ethics	110
4.12	Methodological Limitations	111
4.13	Chapter Summary	113
5	Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis	114
5.1	Introduction	114
5.2	Providers' and customers' view of customer solutions and customer readiness in the Jordanian market	115
5.3	RQ1: What influence, if any, does low customer readiness in solutions markets have on the role of the provider in the solutions value co-creation process?	123
5.3.1	Market Development.....	123
5.3.2	Requirements definition	130
5.3.3	Solutions deployment and post-deployment	132
5.4	RQ2: <i>How does adopting a multiple solution value proposition approach influence value communication and the co-creation activity?</i>	137
5.4.1	Strategic type of customer value proposition associated with offering on-premise solutions (owned by the customer)	137
5.4.2	Transactional type of customer value proposition associated with offering cloud based-solutions (pay-per-use).....	139
5.5	RQ3: How does an Arabian business culture impact the solutions value co-creation process?	141
5.5.1	The influence of (Wasta) and interpersonal connections	142
5.5.2	Jordanian buyers' treatment of time.....	145
5.5.3	Involvement of top management of supplier firms	147
5.6	RQ4: What provider and customer practices lead to destroying value co-creation experiences in solutions exchange?	147
5.6.1	Customers' reliance on wasta practice when choosing suppliers	148
5.6.2	Unwillingness to share accurate information	150
5.6.3	Reluctance to adopt technology-based solutions	152
5.6.4	Lack of operant resources (knowledge and skills).....	154
5.6.5	Customers' failure to read solutions contracts adequately.....	155
5.6.6	Customer contact person-related issues	157

5.6.7	Providers' failure to meet solutions deadlines	158
5.7	Chapter Summary	159
6	Chapter 6: Discussion	161
6.1	Introduction	161
6.2	Low customer readiness market and solutions offered	162
6.3	RQ1: What influence, if any, does low customer readiness in solutions markets have on the role of the provider in the solutions value co-creation process	165
6.3.1	Market Development Phase	165
6.3.2	Providers' role at the requirements' definition: Customer resources organiser	169
6.3.3	Provider role at the deployment and post-deployment phase: Value-in-use enabler	171
6.4	RQ3: How does adopting a multiple solution value proposition approach influence value communication and the co-creation activity?	175
6.5	RQ3: How does an Arabian business culture impact the solutions value co-creation process?	178
6.5.1	Influence of personal connections and wasta.....	178
6.5.2	Jordanian buyers' treatment of time.....	180
6.5.3	Involvement of top management of supplier firms	181
6.6	RQ4: What provider and customer practices lead to destroying value co-creation experiences in solution exchanges?	182
6.6.1	Using wasta practice when deciding on solution supplier	184
6.6.2	Unwillingness to share accurate information	186
6.6.3	Reluctance to adopt technology-based solutions	187
6.6.4	Lack of operant resources	188
6.6.5	Customers' failure to read solution contracts adequately	189
6.6.6	Customer contact person-related issues	190
6.6.7	Providers' failure to meet solutions deadlines	190
6.7	Chapter Summary	194
7	Chapter 7: Conclusions	196
7.1	Review of Aim and Research Questions	196

7.1.1	Research Question One	196
7.1.2	Research Question Two	197
7.1.3	Research Question Three	199
7.1.4	Research Question Four	200
7.2	Contribution to Knowledge	200
7.2.1	Contribution to Theory	201
7.2.2	Contribution to Practice	204
7.3	Research Limitations	206
7.4	Future Research	208
7.5	Chapter Summary	209
	References	210
8	Appendices	232

List of Tables

Table 2.1: Development of S-D logic foundational premises and axioms.....	16
Table 2.2: Examples of the shift to customer solutions	31
Table 2.3: Current definitions of customer solutions	33
Table 2.4: Drivers of customer solutions	40
Table 2.5: Criteria of high customer readiness to operate within solutions markets	56
Table 4.1: Ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods and techniques	76
Table 4.2: Contrasting implications of positivism and interpretive paradigms	79
Table 4.3: Description of major interpretivist methodologies.....	86
Table 4.4: Solution provider interviewee characteristics	95
Table 4.5: Customer interviewee characteristics	99
Table 4.6: Selected approaches to analyse qualitative data.....	104
Table 4.7: Phases of Template Analysis.....	107
Table 4.8: Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research.....	109
Table 4.9: Summary of the methodological decisions	113
Table 5.1: Providers' roles to increase customer readiness.....	136
Table 6.1: Multiple view of customer solution value propositions.....	176

List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Research design overview	8
Figure 2.1: The three cornerstones of customer solutions concept (own figure).....	36
Figure 2.2: Customer solutions drivers	39
Figure 2.3: Relational view of customer solutions.....	45
Figure 2.4: Recent development on value co-creation phases of customer solutions	51
Figure 2.5: Variation in the relevance of solutions value co-creation phases across different roles in the buying centre	54
Figure 2.6: A homogenous solutions value proposition view (own figure).....	60
Figure 2.7: Areas that will be highlighted in this study	64
Figure 3.1: Study research context.....	74
Figure 4.1: Relevance of the interpretive approach to this study.....	81
Figure 6.1: Extended solutions conceptualisation in low customer readiness market in the ICT sector.....	174
Figure 6.2: Impact of Arabian business culture on value co-creation	182
Figure 6.3: Customer and provider practices that cause negative co-creation outcomes	184
Figure 6.4: Identified customer and provider practices that lead to negative co- creation experiences in the Jordanian's ICT solution sector.....	193
Figure 6.5: Diagrammatical illustration of findings.....	195

PUBLICATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE THESIS

Hamadneh, S.W., Caldwell, N. and Ghadge, A. (2018). *Value co-creation in B2B customer solutions: An Arabian Perspective*. Conference proceedings of the 6th international conference on the contemporary marketing issues ICCMI, 27-29 June, Athens, Greece.

Hamadneh, S.W., Caldwell, N. and Ghadge, A. (2018). *Sources of value co-destruction in solutions marketing: A customer and provider perspective*. Conference proceedings of the 47th annual European Marketing Academy conference EMAC, 29 May/1st June, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland, UK.

Hamadneh, S.W., Caldwell, N. and Ghadge, A. (2017). *Customer solutions: Does a non-western context matter? Empirical evidence from Jordan*. Conference proceedings of the 24th annual European Operations Management Associations Academy conference EurOMA, 1st-5th July, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, Scotland, UK.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction of chapter

This chapter provides a background for the research. It begins by discussing the motivation and rationale for conducting this research. Subsequently, the chapter outlines the research aim and questions and justifies its originality. The chapter concludes by presenting the research design followed in this research and outlining thesis contents.

1.2 Rational for the Research

The primary motivation for carrying out this study stems from the challenges the researcher faced while working in marketing and selling telecom services solutions to business customers in the Jordanian market. The fierce competition among suppliers forces them to differentiate their goods and services by integrating them into solutions offerings. However, while telecom solutions providers invest heavily in enhancing their solutions offerings to add value to their business customers, buyer firms tend to be more price conscious and not always willing to invest and pay for such solutions. Also, choosing the best solutions offerings and the right supplier can be also a challenge for many customers who may have limited experience in technology-related solutions. This picture serves as a challenge for Jordanian solutions providers and customers to achieve a successful interactive process when buying and selling customer solutions. Hence, this context provides an interesting opportunity to gain more in-depth insights from Jordanian providers and their customers about the collaborative process they go through when buying and selling a customer solution.

The motivation for conducting this study was reinforced by the theoretical gaps identified in current solutions marketing research. Recent academic work on the business to business (B2B) customer solutions concept draws heavily on the theoretical foundation of value co-creation of the service dominant logic (S-D) of marketing, defining it as “*the combining of supplier and customer processes and resources through a joint resource integration process to create collective and individual value in use*” (Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016, P.114). Despite the large body of work on the customer solutions concept within B2B contexts (e.g., Davies, 2004; Ceci

and Masini, 2011; Ulaga and Reinartz, 2011; Storbacka et al., 2013; Worm et al., 2017), research on solutions marketing and how customers and providers perform their roles and integrate their resources during the co-creation has received less attention from solutions scholars (Nordin and Kowalkowski, 2010; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016; Petri and Jacob, 2016). Therefore, these authors have called for more empirical studies to understand the complex collaborative process between the buyer and supplier within solution exchanges. This study responds to these calls by highlighting four distinct but interrelated gaps in the current solutions marketing knowledge.

First, the limited number of published solutions marketing studies tend to concentrate on developed markets where customers and providers are assumed to be equal parties in the value co-creation activities. Specifically, customers were assumed to have high solutions readiness at the early phase of the co-creation process through their emphasis on solutions outcomes (value-in-use) when approaching their solution providers (Windler et al., 2016). Extant research also portrays that customers are able to identify their exact needs and requirements before engaging with their solutions providers (Petri and Jacob, 2016), acknowledge and perform their roles effectively in the value co-creation process and adopt the solution into their processes effectively (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). Academic research in other market contexts where customers may have low solutions readiness which may hamper them to actively engage in solution markets and perform their roles in the co-creation, remains scarce (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012).

Therefore, extant research (e.g., Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012) posits the need to extend their findings into such low customer readiness solution markets (LCRMs) to determine its impact on the provider's role in supporting the co-creation process of customer solutions. Investigating the providers' role in supporting customers' processes and resources during the co-creation in such LCRMs is important because current theory suggests that creating effective customer solutions depends largely on customers' ability to apply their resource and perform their roles effectively in the value co-creation process (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016).

The second gap in the current solutions marketing research stems from lack of detailed insights into how solution providers develop and communicate their solution value proposition into their business customers. This gap is resulting from the predominant focus on the linear collaborating process embedded in developing and implementing customer solutions. The customer value proposition concept has been conceptualised as “*reciprocal promises of value, operating to and from suppliers and customers seeking an equitable exchange*” (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006, p. 334–335). This reciprocity represents an “*invitation to play*” whereby the supplier and the customer propose and outline their views and expectations regarding the co-creation activities and value-in-use (Eggert et al., 2018).

Although solutions marketing scholars do not explicitly depict the customer value proposition in their discourse (e.g., Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011; Petri and Jacob, 2016), this research tends to have a homogeneous view of the solution value proposition, characterising it as a complex offering that involves an intense value co-creation interactive process by focusing on solutions offered to large business customers. However, extant research showed that customers do not necessarily want a full range of customised offerings but, rather, require solutions that are most pertinent to their business needs and concerns (Brax and Jonsson, 2009; Payne and Frow, 2014). Therefore, Eggert and his colleagues (2018) argue that providers in business markets are required to offer multiple customer value propositions which address different types of customers’ problems and concerns. Nevertheless, these scholars acknowledge that their work remains theoretically grounded and needs further empirical investigation. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by adopting a multiple solution value proposition approach to highlight its influence on the co-creation activities and identify managerial implications. Addressing this issue in solutions marketing research breaks free from the “*one size fits all solution*” approach (Windler et al., 2016) and helps managers to plan and organise their resources and processes effectively during the co-creation.

The third gap stems from the predominant focus on solutions marketing research in western markets, ignoring the potential impact of other business cultures on the solution value co-creation process. Although the value co-creation notion treats individuals involved in the co-creation as resource integrators whose behaviours and interactions are largely influenced by their cultural backgrounds, norms and values

(Edvardsson, Tronvoll and Gruber, 2011; Ostrom et al., 2015), this remains at a theoretical level and requires further empirical investigation. Powers et al. (2016) examined solutions marketing in China without a delineation of the impact of business culture, but they posit a need to investigate the impact of cultural and social contexts on the value co-creation phases of customer solutions.

Hence, this study will address this gap by employing an Arabian context to investigate the impact of Arabian business culture on the customer solutions process. A review of the literature on the international business management and marketing research suggests Arabian business culture is different than the western culture where most of the current solutions value co-creation studies were carried out. For instance, Arab business models value relationships and people more than what is exchanged (Berger *et al.*, 2015; ALHussan, AL-Husan and Alhesan, 2017). This tendency of Arabian business culture towards developing social relationships has been shown to influence the buyers' decision of choosing their suppliers. Particularly, Arabian business buyers tend largely to choose their suppliers based on what is known as *wasta* connections¹ (Hutchings and Weir, 2006; Berger *et al.*, 2015) rather than the quality of providers' offerings. However, the influence of using *wasta* connections as a decisive factor when choosing a certain supplier in Arabian contexts appears to contradict with basic considerations that should be taken by customers when sourcing customer solutions. In a customer solution context, where the customer tends to pay a price premium for customisation compared to stand-alone goods or services (Sawhney, 2006) and perceive a high degree of risk associated with delivery conditions and performance (Sarp and Gadde, 2008), it has been argued that customers should choose the best solution provider who can demonstrate its ability to develop and implement effective customer solutions (Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011).

Hence, choosing an Arabian context in this study should provide an interesting context to understand how Arabian business culture may influence how customers and suppliers develop and apply their resources during the co-creation. Indeed, the Arab world is of major significance to the west as it is an important economic region due to its natural resources, political influence, geographic location and market size, making it

¹ *Wasta* "is a form of favouritism that provides individuals with advantages not because of merit or right but because of who they know" (Mohamed and Mohamad, 2011, p.412).

a lucrative commercial opportunity for international firms (Abosag and Lee, 2013; Berger et al., 2015).

Fourthly, although several studies in S-D logic literature allude to the possibility for value co-creation experiences to be suboptimal (e.g., Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010), it is only recently that researchers have begun to examine the value co-destruction concept (e.g., Prior and Marcos-cuevas, 2016; Vafeas, Hughes and Hilton, 2016; Järvi, Kähkönen and Torvinen, 2018). Hence, this study incorporates value co-destruction insights into the complex practice of B2B customer solutions. The context of customer solutions appears to be an interesting context to understand co-destruction activities because customers' and suppliers' activities are fraught with different challenges including conflicting expectations and requirements between both parties (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Sjödin, Parida and Wincent, 2016). Hence, the study proposes that extending value co-destruction thought into customer solutions practice is important given that there is a consensus among value co-destruction scholars (e.g., Echeverri and Skålén, 2011; Prior and Marcos-cuevas, 2016) that co-destruction coexists and happens simultaneously with co-creation activities.

Thus, the research gaps identified above combined with the motivation behind conducting this study, lead to formulating the research aim and research questions which will be presented next.

1.3 Research Aim and Questions

Research studies have suggested that solutions marketing research is an extremely fertile area for academic researchers (Sawhney, 2006; Nordin and Kowalkowski, 2010; Macdonald et al., 2016). According to most of the literature produced on this subject, attention should be directed toward understanding the collaboration process of value co-creation in the context of customer solutions (e.g., Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Petri and Jacob, 2016; Sjödin et al., 2016). While previous research has focused on solutions marketing in western markets and high customer readiness markets (HCRMs), researchers have given little theoretical attention to how value co-creation activities play out in different markets and cultural contexts. Hence, the primary aim of this study is to develop a better understanding of value co-creation trajectories

within B2B customer solutions in LCRMs. Accordingly, the study raises four interrelated questions:

- 1) What influence, if any, does low customer readiness in solutions markets have on the role of the provider in the solutions value co-creation process?
- 2) How does adopting a multiple solution value proposition approach influence value communication and the co-creation activity?
- 3) How does an Arabian business culture impact the solutions value co-creation process?
- 4) What provider and customer practices lead to destroying value co-creation experiences in solutions exchange?

To answer the four research questions, this study will employ solutions offerings originated in the information and communication technology sector (ICT) to identify the salient nuances embedded in solutions marketing in this sector. The ICT sector has been recognised for its relevance in integrating products and services, thus offering a wide range of customer solutions (Helander and Möller, 2008; Kauffman and Tsai, 2009). Therefore, this sector provides an interesting context to understand the collaborative process embedded in value co-creation activities when developing and implementing technology-based solutions offerings (deLeon and Chatterjee, 2017).

1.4 Originality of Study

The novelty of this thesis is that it expands our understanding of the customer solutions research within low customer readiness markets. In particular, the study contributes to the body of knowledge of B2B solutions marketing research by investigating the value co-creation trajectories embedded in the collaborative process among the customer and supplier when engaging in a solution exchange. The thesis is expected to make four theoretical contributions. First, the present study contributes to value co-creation of the service dominant logic (S-D) of marketing by identifying the supplier's roles to increase customers' readiness to effectively operate and co-create value within solution markets. Second, this thesis contributes to solutions marketing research by highlighting the importance of adopting a multiple solution value proposition approach and identifying its influence on the co-creation activities.

Third, this study contributes to solutions marketing research by highlighting the impact of Arabian business culture on the co-creation phases of customer solutions. Fourth, the thesis integrates the growing body of research on value co-destruction into

the complex practice of customer solutions. By doing so, the present study identifies provider and customer firms' practices that lead to negative co-creation experiences within solution exchanges.

The study also attempts to contribute to practice by demonstrating various roles that can be utilised by the solutions providers to increase customers' readiness to operate within the ICT solution sector. Furthermore, the study will offer some evidence on why solution providers need to adopt a multiple solution value propositions approach. The study will also make customers and providers aware of how their behaviours during the interactive process can be perceived negatively by their counterparts and, thus, threaten the success of solutions development and implementation. Finally, for international solutions providers operating or wishing to offer customer solutions in the Arab world, the study will provide them with some guidance that helps them to succeed in Arabian contexts.

1.5 Research Design

The current thesis was designed as follows. The theoretical background to the research area is provided through three main sections. The first section introduces the conceptual framework of the S-D logic of marketing and its fundamental tenet of value co-creation to establish a theoretical lens that will underpin this study. The second section reviews the customer solutions concept in business markets and identifies how this concept embodies the S-D logic framework. Given that the thesis focuses on the marketing aspect of customer solutions, the third section critically reviews solutions marketing research, highlighting four interrelated theoretical gaps concerning value co-creation trajectories within customer solutions. This is followed by shedding light on the role of the research context in developing and testing marketing theories to underscore the need for extending solutions marketing research beyond the western context.

Through the lens of interpretivism, an in-depth qualitative interviews approach was utilised in order to develop a better understanding of value co-creation activities embedded in solutions exchange in LCRMs. In total, this study carried out 44 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Jordanian solution practitioners from customer and supplier firms to understand how they viewed and experienced solutions co-creation activities. A template analysis technique is utilised to help structure and present the

main and sub-themes derived from the data analysis process. Subsequently, the empirical findings are then compared with previous relevant literature, resulting in an extension to the current solution framework when applied in LCRMs and development of a theoretical framework highlighting the impact of Arabian business culture on customer solutions processes. Finally, theoretical and practical implications are drawn based on the empirical findings.

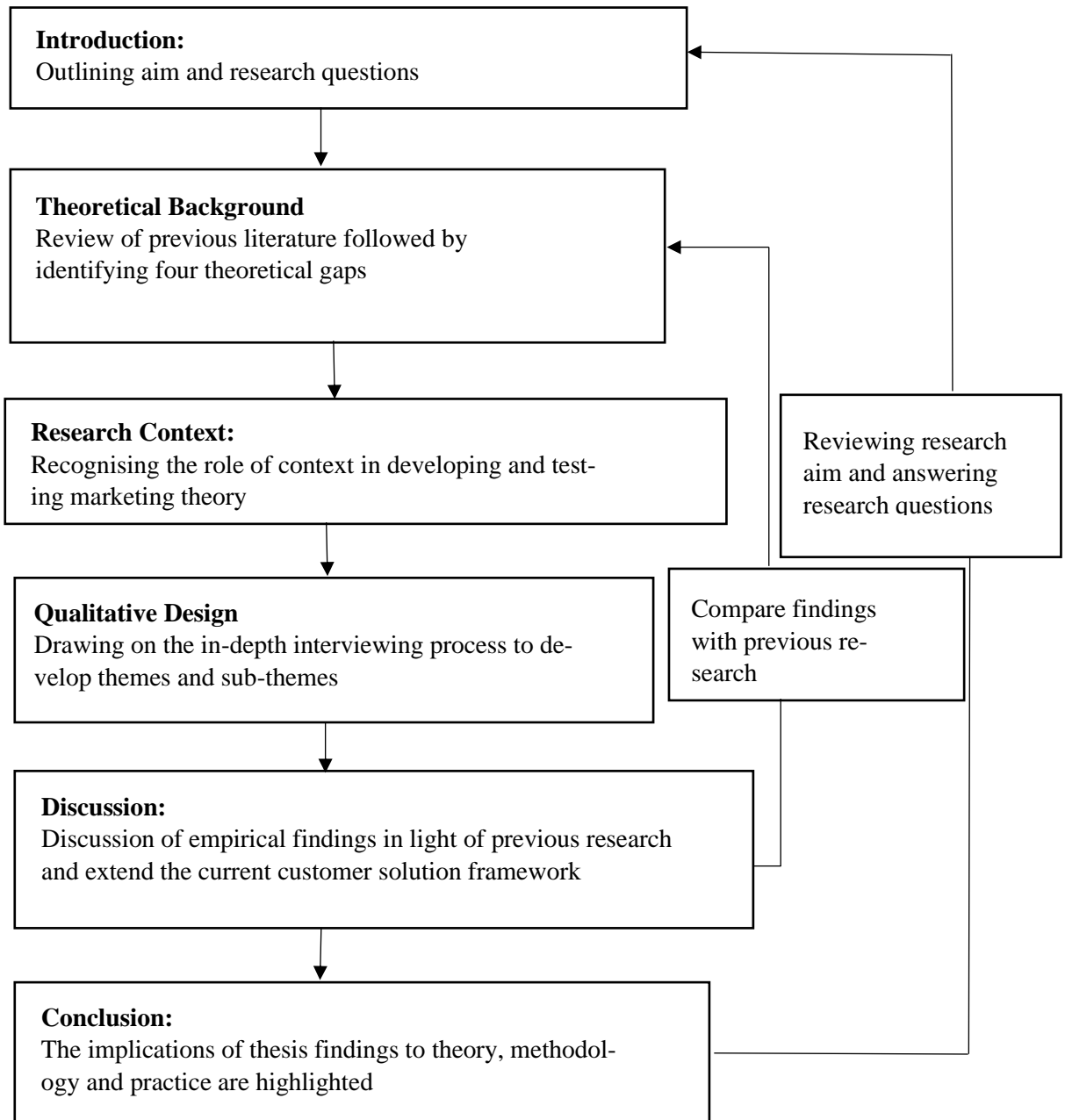


Figure 1.1: Research design overview

1.6 Outline of Chapters

The thesis consists of seven chapters organised as follows.

- **Chapter One**, the present chapter provides an overview of the research background and the motivation for carrying out this study. It also describes, briefly, the main research gaps derived from reviewing solutions marketing literature. Subsequently, the chapter presents the primary research aim and underlines the research questions that this study attempts to answer. This chapter also outlines some potential theoretical and empirical contributions to be made in this study.
- **Chapter Two**, this chapter represents the theoretical background of this thesis and it is divided into three main sections, S-D logic of marketing, customer solutions and solutions marketing respectively. The first section begins by introducing the S-D logic of marketing as a main theoretical lens that underpins this study. This section presents an S-D logic view of value and reviews the co-creation trajectories identified by value co-creation and value co-destruction. The second section of this chapter reviews existing academic work on customer solutions provision. It discusses the definition of the customer solutions concept and describes solutions characteristics. This section also examines the drivers that led to the evolving customer solutions concept and outcomes achieved by solutions providers and customers when offering and buying customer solutions. The last part of this chapter critically reviews solutions marketing literature, particularly the value co-creation activities embedded in the relational process embedded in customer solutions. This section concludes with the identification of the major theoretical gaps in solutions marketing research, resulting in four main research questions which this study aims to answer.
- **Chapter Three**, this chapter addresses the research context within which this research is grounded. It begins by highlighting the role of contexts in developing and testing marketing theory. The second section of this chapter introduces the Arab culture as a unique and distinct social and cultural context. This is followed by reviewing previous research on business relationships in Arabian markets to synthesise Arabian business culture. Finally, the specific selection of Jordan as an

Arabian country that will be employed to answer the research questions of this study is introduced and justified.

- **Chapter Four**, this chapter presents the philosophical and methodological assumptions adopted to answer the four research questions. The interpretive approach is justified for its suitability to investigate value co-creation trajectories within the customer solutions context. This is followed by outlining the research approaches about theoretical insights, explaining the relevance of the inductive reasoning approach for this study. The research design of this study adopts a qualitative research approach that is based on semi-structured interviews with customers and suppliers' firms engaged in solutions exchanges in the Jordanian ICT sector. Subsequently, the chapter introduces the template analysis technique and its suitability for this study, describing its procedures in detail. The chapter ends by describing some of the ethical considerations taken into account while undertaking this study.
- **Chapter Five**, this chapter presents the study findings corresponding to the four identified research questions. The first section reports on providers and customers' interviews about their view of customer solutions and solutions market readiness. The next section answers the first research question in this study through identifying four distinct, but complementary roles performed by solutions providers to support the customer value creation process in such markets. The third section empirically demonstrates the importance of adopting a multiple solution value propositions approach in the ICT solution sector and determine its impact on the co-creation activities. The fourth section, reports on the impact of Arabian business culture on the solutions value co-creation process, answering the third research question of this study. Subsequently, this chapter ends by highlighting customer and provider practices that lead them to experiencing suboptimal value in solution exchanges.
- **Chapter Six**, this chapter discusses the research findings in line with the previous studies. The purpose of this chapter is to extend the current customer solutions conceptualisation into low customer readiness markets and develop a framework that illustrates the impact of Arabian business culture on value co-creation initiation. Also, the chapter utilises a table to compare two perspectives of customer value propositions in the ICT sector, highlighting the implications on solutions

co-creation activities. Finally, provider and customer practices that lead to negative co-creation experiences are integrated with the current customer solution framework.

- **Chapter Seven**, this chapter represents the conclusion of the thesis and reviews the research aim and questions. This is followed by a summary of the theoretical contribution to the customer solutions field. Also, this chapter offers some practical implications and recommendations that are derived from the empirical findings. Finally, the chapter concludes by highlighting limitations of the study and suggests avenues for future research.

1.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the overarching aim of the thesis. It started with describing the rationale and motivation for carrying out this study. The chapter highlighted the potential contribution of this research to theory and practice and its originality. The chapter concluded by outlining the structure of the thesis including a brief description of the content of each chapter. The next chapter provides the theoretical background that will underpin this thesis.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Underpinning and Customer Solutions

2.1 Introduction

The primary aim of this study is to develop a better understanding of value co-creation trajectories within the B2B customer solutions in LCRMs. The purpose of this chapter is to provide the theoretical background to the customer solutions concept. To do so, this chapter is divided into three main sections including: service dominant logic (S-D) of marketing, customer solutions and solutions marketing respectively. Adopting this structure allows the researcher to review broader theoretical frameworks and concepts that underpin customer solutions research before narrowing the scope to the prime area of solutions marketing.

The first section begins by reviewing the service dominant logic of marketing to understand its contribution to the customer value concept. The review focuses on understanding fundamental premises of this logic in order to apply them within customer solutions research. Specifically, the review focuses on value co-creation and co-destruction concepts in order to relate them to solutions marketing research.

The second section of this chapter reviews existing academic work on customer solutions concept. It begins by reviewing some product and market offerings to gain better understanding of the historic development of the concept. Thereafter, this section presents how the customer solution concept embodies the service dominant logic of marketing through examining its main cornerstones. Next, customer solutions drivers and outcomes are highlighted to signify why suppliers and customers in business markets are increasingly moving towards solutions business.

Section three critically reviews solutions marketing literature through investigating previous relevant frameworks that have drawn conclusions from high customer readiness solutions markets. This review enables the researcher to identify four distinct but interrelated gaps which, accordingly, lead to formulate four research questions.

2.2 Section One: Service Dominant Logic of Marketing

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, marketing thought was challenged by Vargo and Lusch (2004) who proposed a new paradigm of marketing which resulted in controversy among both academics and practitioners. In their article “*Evolving to a New Dominant Logic for Marketing*” in the *Journal of Marketing* 2004, the authors introduced service dominant (S-D) logic to marketing which represents the convergence of contemporary marketing thoughts. Their work is based on historical analysis of the evolution of marketing thought through the roots of economic and business views (Vargo and Morgan, 2005). The new perspective of marketing centres on the concept of service provision as a fundamental approach of doing business which can be applied to any market offering (Vargo and Lusch, 2004a; Grönroos, 2011). Vargo and Lusch’s argument is that the traditional marketing paradigm or so-called “goods dominant logic” (G-D), which centres on the exchange of tangible goods and value embedded in manufacturing outputs, is no longer adequate for current marketing thought. Therefore, they put forward S-D logic to shift marketing thought’s focus on service provision, value co-creation, and relationships.

However, It is important to note that Vargo and Lusch have explicitly stated that they have not invented the S-D but rather they have synthesised the apparent divergent streams of research in academic marketing (Lusch and Vargo, 2006b). Since it emerged, Vargo and Lusch have received comments from distinguished scholars within a broader business community, igniting a debate on different aspects of their new marketing paradigm. This has resulted in publishing various articles spanning from 2004 to 2016, and two books “*The Service Dominant Logic of Marketing, Dialog, Debate and Directions, 2006*”; and “*Service Dominant Logic, Premises, Perspectives and Possibilities, 2014*”. In order to understand the S-D of marketing and its fundamental tenets, it is important first to briefly review the G-D logic and its main shortcomings that have urged marketing scholars to call for a new marketing paradigm.

2.2.1 Goods Dominant Logic of Marketing

Before proposing the service-centred view of marketing, Vargo and Lusch (2004) brought their readers back to the historical development of marketing thought which

was inherited from economics. The early thought of marketing (1900-1950) emphasised operand resources and factors of manufacturing as the fundamental basis of exchange. Operand resources are typically tangible and finite in nature such as raw material and tangible goods (Vargo and Lusch, 2004a). However, Vargo and Lusch criticised the economic perspective as manufacturers' ultimate emphasis was to maximise productivity at efficient production costs over considering different customers' needs. Meanwhile, the marketing task was primarily viewed as a process of distributing and exchange of commodities. Because G-D logic recognises operand resources (tangible outputs) as the fundamental basis of exchange, the value was determined by the producer, and it was embedded in the tangible goods and defined in terms of value-in-exchange. Therefore, customers were seen as recipients of goods and operand resource who do not actively interact with their providers and practically contribute in their own value creation process.

However, from the 1950s and onwards, there appeared to be calls made by leading marketing scholars to distinguish marketing thought from economic thought. For instance, it has been argued that business organisations should focus on what customers need and want rather than the production process and, thus, adopting a customer orientation is vital (Levitt, 1960; Brady and Cronin, 2001). This distinction resulted in the marketing discipline becoming a distinct subject from economics (Vargo and Lusch, 2004a). In spite of such attempts to differentiate the marketing concept from other subjects, Kotler (2003) believed that the main marketing function centres on distributing goods to customers at a lower cost. Therefore, it can be argued that marketing thought was still largely affected by the economic view of the value embedded in tangible goods (Lusch and Vargo, 2006b). This was apparent through pursuing the standardisation objective in the manufacturing process to achieve firms' financial objectives rather than customisation that captures different customers' needs.

Another motive behind the urgent need for a new marketing paradigm is the emergence of what is known as *services marketing* at the beginning of 1980s (e.g., Grönroos, 1984; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985) which emerged as a sub-discipline of marketing to deal with marketing immaterial goods and outputs. Services marketing scholars argued that services (performances rather than objects, i.e., financial services) differ from tangible goods in various aspects including: intangibility (cannot be seen, felt and tasted); perishability (cannot be produced in advanced or

inventoried); inseparability (production and consumption occur simultaneously); and, heterogeneity (variation in quality) (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1985). However, the S-D logic of marketing stresses that the services marketing subject is grounded within the G-D logic as it views the value embedded in the intangible outputs. Indeed, the debate on goods and services as different marketing sub-disciplines resulted in a more fragmented marketing thought, warranting marketing scholars to suggest there is a need to unify marketing thought where boundaries between goods and services are blurred. For instance, Rust (1998, p. 107) stated “*The typical service research article documented ways in which services were different than goods....It is time for a change*”.

In conclusion, by focusing on tangible goods as the fundamental basis of exchange and value being embedded in goods and services which is determined by the provider, the G-D logic was primarily linked to the process of make-and-sell or production-and-distribution perspective. As a consequence, customers were viewed as only recipients of providers’ offerings and, thus, customers have less involvement in creating their own value. Meanwhile, marketing scholars realised that traditional G-D logic is no longer adequate for the modern marketing environment, calling to free marketing thought from the economic thought embedded in the G-D logic. For example, Webster (1992, p.1) argued: “*The historical marketing management function, based on the microeconomic maximization paradigm, must be critically examined for its relevance to marketing theory and practice*”. Similarly, Sheth and Parvatiyar (2000, p140) also pointed out that “*an alternative paradigm of marketing is needed, a paradigm that can account for the continuous nature of relationships among marketing actors*”.

Accordingly, Vargo and Lusch were the first scholars who responded to these calls by proposing the new paradigm shift in marketing or what has become known as S-D logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004a). The new marketing paradigm of marketing centres on freeing marketing thought from the economic view and eliminates the goods versus services debate. Having discussed the G-D logic of marketing and its main shortcomings, the next section presents the emergence of the new marketing thought the so-called S-D logic.

2.2.2 Emerging the New Paradigm Shift “S-D” logic

In the S-D view, Vargo and Lusch (2004, p.2) define *service* as “*the application of specialized competences (knowledge and skills) through deeds, processes and performances for the benefit of another entity or the entity itself.*” In contrast to the G-D logic that features tangible goods as the fundamental basis of exchange, the S-D logic of marketing places more emphasis on intangible resources, processes and relationships. In order to present the S-D view of marketing, Vargo and Lusch have put forward the new marketing thought based on 11 foundational premises (FPs, Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: *Development of S-D logic foundational premises and axioms*

	2004	2008	Update 2014 & 2016	Axioms given 2016
FP 1	The application of specialized skills and knowledge is the fundamental unit of exchange.	Service is the fundamental basis of exchange.	No Change	Axiom 1
FP 2	Indirect exchange masks the fundamental unit of exchange.	Indirect exchange masks the fundamental basis of exchange.	No Change	Derivative from Axiom 1
FP 3	Goods are distribution mechanisms for service provision.	No Change	No Change	Derivative from Axiom 1
FP 4	Knowledge is the fundamental source of competitive advantage.	Operant resources are the fundamental source of competitive advantage	Operant resources are the fundamental source of strategic benefit.	Derivative from Axiom 1
FP 5	All economies are service economies.	No Change	No Change	Derivative from Axiom 1
FP 6	The customer is always the co-producer.	The customer is always co-creator of value.	Value is cocreated by multiple actors, always including the beneficiary.	Axiom 2
FP 7	The enterprise can only make value propositions.	The enterprise cannot deliver value, but only offer value proposition.	Actors cannot deliver value but can participate in the creation and offering of value propositions.	Derivative from Axiom 2
FP 8	Service-centered view is customer oriented and relational.	A service-centered view is inherently customer oriented and relational.	A service-centered view is inherently beneficiary oriented and relational.	Derivative from Axiom 2
FP 9		All social and economic actors are resource integrators.	No Change	Axiom 3
FP 10		Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically	No Change	Axiom 4

	determined by the beneficiary.	
FP 11	Value cocreation is coordinating through actor-generated institutions and institutional agreements.	Axiom 5

Source: Adapted from (Vargo and Lusch, 2016)

As the above table shows, eight of the foundational assumptions were firstly presented in their seminal 2004 paper “Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing” paper in *the Journal of Marketing* (Vargo and Lusch, 2004a). After proposing this new marketing shift, various marketing scholars engaged in the S-D debate by offering commentaries on Vargo and Lusch’s original work. Consequently, Vargo and Lusch have responded to such calls by modifying and adding further foundational premises to the original foundational premises of S-D logic (Lusch and Vargo, 2006a; Vargo and Lusch, 2008b, 2016). For example, some scholars (e.g., Gronroos, 2006; Gummesson, 2006) pointed out the new marketing framework was particularly unclear about the networked nature value creation and its complexity. As a result, in 2008 a new two foundational premises were added in response to scholars’ commentaries and to help marketing scholars to understand the new marketing framework. Hence, the ninth foundational premise was added to recognise the interactive and networked nature of value creation. Similarly, the tenth fundamental premise was added to stress that value created by the customer is phenomenological idiosyncratic.

Recently, Lusch and Vargo (2014) realised that their 11 foundational premises can be related to each other and there is a need to reduce theses premises. As a result, these premises were categorised into five axioms to provide parsimonious framework while still being isomorphic as possible. As presented in table 2.1 above, every axiom focuses on one fundamental element of the new marketing framework. For example, while the first axiom focuses on the core of service and delineates how service can be provided and its view to the goods as a distribution mechanism for delivering the service, the fifth axiom focuses on the central role of institutions and institutional arrangements that foster cooperative behaviours among actors within a service system. Overall, the ongoing development of S-D logic and its lexicon is expected as its proponents pointed out their framework is an open source for debate and advancement (Vargo and Lusch, 2008b).

In S-D framework, it is worth noting that the singular use of *service* rather than *services* is intentional as the former reflects the notion of doing something beneficial whereas the latter is built on the G-D logic which views “*services*” as intangible units of outputs. In this sense, S-D logic redefines the roles of services and goods as distribution mechanisms for service provision (FP3). Accordingly, from an S-D logic of marketing, the boundaries between goods and services are increasingly blurred (Vargo and Lusch, 2004b). Additionally, in contrast to the traditional logic of marketing (G-D) which centres on operand resources (tangible outputs) as the fundamental basis of exchange, S-D logic centres that service (defined in applying operand resources, FP1) is the fundamental basis of exchange. Operand resources are often intangible and dynamic such as knowledge and skills, and they are capable of producing an effect when integrating with other operand and operand resources (Vargo and Lusch, 2008b).

Broadly, S-D logic draws on resource advantage (R-A) theory to highlight the significance of operand resources in service exchanges. R-A theory explicates how a company can create a competitive advantage over its competitors (Hunt, and Madhavaram, 2006). It also views resources as anything that can generate value including operand and operand resources. Drawing on the (R-A) theory, S-D logic proposes that people and companies who possess more resources can create more advantage and value than others. Given that S-D logic defines service as “*the application of specialized competences (knowledge and skills) through deeds, processes and performances for the benefit of another entity or the entity itself*”, it can be argued that all actors involved in an exchange are resource integrators (FP9) who integrate their resources throughout the value co-creation process (FP6).

It is important to highlight that S-D logic embraces that value co-creation goes beyond the customer and the provider boundaries to a broader perspective where all participants in a service system (e.g., firms, customers, suppliers employees, stakeholders) contribute to creating value for themselves and others (Vargo and Lusch, 2008a; Pinho et al., 2014). However, in this study the term co-creation is used to refer to the provider and customer involved in a customer solution exchange. Having defined the S-D logic of marketing and outlined its main fundamental premises, the next section will briefly review the S-D logic view of the value concept.

2.2.3 *Service Dominant Logic View of Value*

While creating and delivering customer value has been perceived as the most fundamental issue in marketing (Khalifa, 2004; Lindgreen and Wynstra, 2005), understanding the concept of customer value has long been a challenge for marketing academics and practitioners alike (Anderson and Narus, 1998; Grönroos and Voima, 2013). These challenges involved in capturing what customer value means stem from the ambiguity and subjectivity of the concept, which is perceived to be a dynamic concept that evolves over time (Khalifa, 2004). According to Ng and Smith (2012), the debate on the customer value concept concerns the locus of value, whether the value or “goodness” of an offering emerges from use or experience (value in use) or from an offering’s worth at the point of exchange (value in exchange).

Marketing and management literature have developed various conceptualisations to understand the customer value construct. For instance Hooper, Steeple and Winters (2001) and (Lewis, 2006) operationalised the value construct as the *economic worth of the customer*. This thought concerns how much customers pay and purchase over a lifetime of purchases from the firm. Other scholars (e.g., Berghman, Matthyssens, and Vandenbempt, 2006; Day, 1990) propose that customer value is determined by *customer satisfaction*, suggesting that superior customer value is achieved when a firm’s offering quality and price equals or exceeds customer expectation. Subsequently, satisfied customers are more likely to be loyal to the firm and, thus, the firm’s aim is to increase customer satisfaction to increase repeat purchase. However, it has been argued that these two approaches of value are firm-centric where the customers are seen as quantifiers of the monetary worth to firms (Woodruff, 1997; Ng and Smith, 2012).

Arguably, such thoughts seem to be consistent with the traditional marketing view of the G-D logic as the value that customers perceive is still highly embedded into an object or market offering. Therefore, it has been argued that the marketing discipline needs a “*richer customer value theory that delves deeply into the customer’s world of product use in their situations*” (Woodruff, 1997, p.150).

On the other hand, there is another group of scholars who adopt the customer-centric view when defining customer value. For instance, Zeithaml (1988), Leszinski and

Marn (1997), Anderson and Narus (1998) are among this group who propose that customer value is a *net benefit*, that is an overall evaluation of what customers get compared to sacrifices they make. Sacrifices include money and efforts that customers need to invest when acquiring and consuming an offering. In addition, Woodruff (1997, p.142) adopts a customer-centric view of value and draws on *means-end theory* and defines customer value as “*a customer’s perceived preference for and evaluation of those product attributes, attribute performances and consequences arising from use that facilitate (or block) achieving the customer’s goals and purposes in use situations*”. In this sense, customers acquire products and services to achieve their desired end state (Khalifa, 2004). Although these two approaches suggest that value is determined by customers through acquiring and using purchased offerings (value-in-exchange and value-in-use), both views limit the role of the customer in subjectively perceiving the value. As a result, these views see customers are passive evaluators rather than active participants in the value creation process (Ng and Smith, 2012).

Against this backdrop, S-D logic has contributed to the customer value concept through two crucial points. First, the S-D of marketing posits that value goes beyond being embedded in tangible goods at the point of exchange (value-in-exchange, G-D logic) to a value that emerges through consumption (value-in-use). Building on S-D logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004a) and means-end theory (Woodruff, 1997), Macdonald et al., (2011, p.671) define value-in-use as “*a customer’s outcome, purpose or objective that is achieved through service*”. This definition implies that value is only determined by customers through the use of the service (value-in-use) (FP10), as “*opposed to value being in tangible goods at the factory gate that is value in-exchange*” (Macdonald et al., 2011, p.671). In consequence, S-D logic posits that the provider’s role is no longer to create and identify customer value, but only offer a value proposition (FP7), that is, configuration of resources that customers draw on to create value-in-use (Skålén et al., 2015).

The shift towards the *value-in-use* concept has been highlighted and discussed extensively before evolving S-D logic. For example, Holbrook (1996, p.138) defines customer value as “*interactive relativistic preference experience*”, highlighting that value does not reside in an object or possession but, rather, only through consumption experience. In this sense, as highlighted by Ng and Smith (2012), S-D logic has adopted Holbrook’s view of value-in-use and elaborated further on its aspects. For instance,

the term “*value in-context*” (e.g., Chandler and Vargo, 2011) has emerged to recognise the role of contexts in influencing how actors interact and perceive their roles when exchanging a service. However, for the sake of ease of reference and consistency with the broader marketing literature, this thesis uses the term of “value-in-use”, acknowledging the contextual nature of service exchange.

The second issue where S-D logic has contributed to customer value is in acknowledging the active role of customers in service exchanges. While customers are perceived as passive recipients to the value embedded in tangible goods in G-D logic, S-D postulates that customers are active actors who integrate and share their operant and operand resources (FP9, Table 2.1) through proposing the notion of value co-creation (FP6, Table 2.1).

Previous discussion aimed at providing an introductory overview of the theoretical development of the service dominant logic of marketing. Given that this study concerns investigating value co-creation trajectories within B2B customer solutions, this study is concerned with the value co-creation notion as a fundamental premise that underpins solutions marketing research. Therefore, it is vital to review the value co-creation concept and its trajectories to understand how previous research defined and conceptualised this notion. Hence, the next subsection reviews the value co-creation concept.

2.2.4 The Concept of Value Co-Creation

Because the S-D logic of marketing recognises the role of the operant resources (i.e., knowledge and skills) as the fundamental basis of the service exchange as highlighted earlier, integrating these resources in collaborative activities among actors is vital. The prefix “co” denotes shared work among actors engaged in a service exchange. In this sense, value co-creation refers to a resource integration process between the customer and provider (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). In this process, customers are viewed as active participants in relational exchanges with their service providers. The S-D logic acknowledgment of the customer’s role as co-creators of value resonates with what Normann and Ramirez (1993, p.69) stated: “*The key to creating value is to co-produce offerings that mobilize customers.*” In this view, IKEA’s customers create value by engaging themselves in assembling and transportation activities of flat pack furniture. In this sense, customers co-create the value by co-producing their furniture

offerings. Therefore, S-D logic initially posited that customers are value co-producers (see FP 6 column 1, table 2.1), mirroring the co-production notion identified by Normann and Ramirez (1993). However, the term “co-production” was modified and renamed later (see Vargo and Lusch, 2008), as customers are value co-creators as the production term denotes making units of outputs which, in turn, was linked to G-D logic.

Since it emerged, the value co-creation research has expanded significantly and attracted enormous interest including the business to consumer (B2C) setting (e.g., Vega-Vazquez, Revilla-Camacho and Cossío-Silva, 2013; Cossío-Silva *et al.*, 2016), business to business (B2B) setting (e.g., Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Petri and Jacob, 2016), service system with many actors (e.g., Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Pinho *et al.*, 2014) and public services sector (e.g., Osborne, 2018). Payne, Storbacka and Frow (2008, p.85) are among the first scholars who attempted to conceptualise and define the value co-creation processes of the S-D logic, determining the value co-creation process as *“the procedures, tasks, mechanisms, activities and interactions which support the co-creation of value.”* They have theoretically conceptualised value co-creation processes into three main spheres. First, they posit that customers contribute to value co-creation by performing several dynamic activities through utilising their operant resources such as information, knowledge and skills (Payne, Storbacka and Frow, 2008). Second, providers, in turn, use their operant resources to understand customers’ business processes in order to learn how best to serve them by proposing the best solution offering. Finally, the encounter sphere, which includes the two-way dynamic interactions which occur between suppliers and buyers (Payne, Storbacka and Frow, 2008; Grönroos and Ravald, 2011; Grönroos and Voima, 2013). Grönroos (2012, p.1520) defines the co-creation notion through the lens of the encounter phase as, *“value co-creation can be defined as the joint actions by a customer (or another beneficiary) and a service provider during their direct interactions.”*

However, the issue of the mechanism whereby these three processes adopted by S-D logic are performed has been controversial among different marketing scholars. This has resulted in a debated question of how value is created and how the customer and provider contribute to the co-creation. For example, Grönroos and Ravald (2010) argue that the concept of value co-creation adopted by S-D was not sufficiently

conceptualised and, thus, the role of the provider and customer in co-creation activities requires further theoretical elaboration. As a result, they propose *service logic* and delineate the customer and provider roles in the service exchange. *Service logic* upholds S-D logic regarding its view on the resource integration among parties as an integral part of service exchange. It also agrees that value is only created by customers in the form of value-in-use. However, while S-D logic confines the provider's role in offering only value propositions (that is configuration of resources that customers draw on to co-create value-in-use), service logic (Grönroos, 2011; Grönroos and Voima, 2013) argues that the provider's role goes beyond by influencing and enhancing customers value-in-use. They propose that co-creation enables providers to engage directly and actively in the customer process of value creation, allowing them to enhance and support the customer's value-in-use.

Further, while the co-creation of S-D logic posits that co-creation is the prevailing foundation in all market offerings whether there is a direct interaction between the customer and the service provider or not, service logic (Grönroos, 2011; Grönroos and Voima, 2013) argues that co-creation of value only takes place through direct interaction with providers and customers (Grönroos, 2011; Grönroos and Voima, 2013). In other words, in the absence of an interaction among the customer and provider, there is no value co-creation, “ *co-creation is a function of interaction* ” (Grönroos and Voima, 2013, p.133). As a result, according to service logic, if the interaction does not occur, the provider role in service exchange becomes only a value facilitator who provides resources to customers who, in turn, use these resources and create value-in-use.

Whilst acknowledging that S-D (Vargo and Lusch, 2004a) and service logic (Grönroos and Ravald, 2011; Grönroos and Voima, 2013) widen the scope of understanding the function of marketing, Heinoen and colleagues (2010) argue that both S-D logic and service logic are highly focused on the provider and interaction process and, thus, customer focus has been missed from the two approaches. As a result, they proposed a *customer dominant* (CD) logic that positions the customer in the centre, stating the focus “*should be on what customers are doing with services and service to accomplish their goals*” (Heinonen et al., 2010, p.534). Hence, according to CD logic, service providers should strive to become involved in the customer's life rather than focusing on the point of interaction and how customers become engaged in co-creation activities.

Overall, the fact that divergent views are found in the academic marketing literature on how value is created and how providers' and customers' roles are performed is, indeed, due to the diverse interpretations on what constitutes value and co-creation (Saarijärvi, Kannan and Kuusela, 2013; Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2018). Nevertheless, those scholars agree that value is neither embedded in a tangible product nor exchanged in market transactions but co-created through joint resource integration processes. Although the collective interactive process is inherent in co-creation activity, extant literature provides little understanding of how customer and provider roles in co-creation play out in various contexts and industries (Grönroos and Ravald, 2011; Ostrom et al., 2015). This lack of research in this area informs the first research question of this study. Specifically, the first research question of this study was formulated to identify the provider's role in the co-creation when the customer lacks readiness to operate within solutions markets.

On the other hand, there has recently been a growing interest in expanding S-D logic literature to recognise the potential adverse outcomes during the co-creation course. This has led to an emerging new trajectory of co-creation which has become commonly known as value co-destruction. Accordingly, the next subsection reviews the relevant literature on the value co-destruction concept.

2.2.5 Value Co-Destruction

While most of the research that concerns value co-creation focuses on positive value co-creation experiences and interactions between the customer and provider, there is anecdotal evidence that suggests that value co-creation can also entail negative outcomes perceived by involved parties, leading to value diminution. Indeed, early marketing research did mention that the interactive process among the customer and provider may not necessarily always lead to positive value co-creation experiences, implicitly indicating what has become known as value co-destruction (e.g., Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Woodruff and Flint, 2006; Grönroos, 2012).

However, Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres (2010) are among the first scholars to specifically address and propose value co-destruction thought in S-D logic. In their conceptual paper, they define the value co-destruction concept as “*an interactional process*

between service systems² that results in a decline in at least one of the systems' well-being (which, given the nature of a service system, can be individual or organisational" (Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010, p.431). They argue that while (S-D) logic posits value-in-use as a positive outcome is generated by a collaborative process through the resource integration between parties, it is logically possible to assume that this process may not necessarily lead to positive experiences and, thus, co-destruction may occur.

Value co-destruction primarily postulates that customer and provider dialogues can be fraught with difficulties and challenges that impede achieving positive value co-creation experiences. Such challenges may arise as various actors (i.e., customer and service provider) who are involved in the co-creation may have different views with regard how their resources and roles should be managed, performed and implemented, leading to a conflict (Laamanen, M. and Skålén, 2015). In this sense, it can be argued that the joint resource integration process among the customer and provider in the co-creation process may also entail value co-destruction. Value co-destruction occurs when one or/both parties of an exchange accidentally or intentionally misuse its own or other party's resources by acting in an inappropriate manner (Loïc Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010; M. Smith, 2013). Resources can be misused if either the customer or the supplier fails to *"integrate and apply the available operant and operand resources of at least one of the service systems (the firm and the customer) in an "appropriate manner" or "expected" manner from the other system's perspective"* (Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010, p.432).

However, it should be noted that value co-destruction should not be understood as another form of service failure (e.g., Tax and Brown, 1998; Hess, Ganesan and Klein, 2003). While service failure as a stream of research has been predominantly defined as service performance that falls below a customer's expectations (Hess, Ganesan and Klein, 2003), the concept of value co-destruction focuses on *"collaborations between actors rather than a one-way delivery of the supplier's product to the customer"* (Prior

² A service system is defined as "configurations of resources (including people, information, and technology) connected to other systems by value propositions" (Vargo, Maglio and Akaka, 2008, p.145).

and Marcos-cuevas, 2016, p.534). For instance, service providers can experience value co-destruction if their customers misuse or misunderstand how to integrate their operant resources with their providers' counterparts (Farquhar and Robson, 2017).

There are few and scattered research streams that investigate the value co-destruction notion: the B2B marketing literature (e.g., Prior and Marcos-cuevas, 2016; Järvi, Kähkönen and Torvinen, 2018) the B2C literature (e.g., Quach and Thaichon, 2017) and the service systems literature (e.g., Makkonen and Olkkonen, 2017). This research draws on various contexts and identifies different reasons that may lead to value co-destruction aiming at conceptualising its causes and managing its consequences.

In consumer markets, drawing on practice theory within the public transportation sector, Echeverri and Skålén's (2011) have found that value co-destruction emerges when customers and service providers draw on "incongruent elements of practices." In other words, value co-destruction may arise if the customer and service provider show disagreement about procedures and practices that inform a specific interaction. In a B2B market context, Prior and Marcos-Cuevas (2016) have drawn on actor engagement styles in the aerospace industry and identified the role of behavioral styles on actors' value co-destruction. Furthermore, Vafeas, Hughes and Hilton, 2016 have sought to identify value co-destruction factors in the UK's creative industry, finding that value co-destruction emerges when actors face the absence of trust, inadequate coordination, inadequate communication, inadequate human capital and a power dependence imbalance.

Recently, Smith (2013) argues that the term value co-destruction is misleading and should not be used as a blanket description, suggesting that value can also be diminished or unevenly distributed. Therefore, Vafeas, Hughes and Hilton (2016) have responded to Smith's (2013) concern and suggest that the destruction term is inadequate because it is an all-encompassing term as it implies irreparable loss. Hence, these researchers have proposed the term value *diminution* instead of co-destruction, defining it as "*the perceived suboptimal value realisation that occurs as a consequence of resources deficiencies in, or resource misuse by, one or more interacting actors*" (p.470). Vafeas and colleagues believe that the term "*diminution*" is more accurate than co-destruction as it would be misleading to use value co-destruction (joint action)

if only one-party experiences value diminution that is caused by the other due to resource deficiencies or resources misuse.

Overall, there seems to be some evidence that scholars who are interested in investigating the opposite side of co-creation highlight that both trajectories (co-creation and co-destruction) should not be viewed as mutually exclusive. Prior and Marcos-Cuevas (2016) point out that if value co-creation occurs, it does not mean that value co-destruction is entirely absent, but co-creation and co-destruction can also coexist in service exchanges. Similarly, as Echeverri and Skålén (2011, p.364) state “*value is both co-created and co-destroyed at the provider customer interface.*”

In summary, while previous fragmented studies on value co-destruction offer valuable insights on how service providers and customers may perceive negative co-creation experiences and failed interaction, this concept remains an extremely fertile area for further development. Therefore, value co-destruction scholars have called for further studies in different industries to provide a more comprehensive picture of this phenomenon (Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010; Prior and Marcos-Cuevas, 2016; Vafeas, Hughes and Hilton, 2016 and Plé, 2017). Similarly, service research has identified the value co-destruction of the S-D logic theme as a priority for academic marketing researchers (Ostrom et al., 2015). This call will have an implication for the fourth research question of this study. Specifically, the fourth research question was formulated to apply the co-destruction concept in a B2B customer solution context.

Given these insights, this study draws on the co-creation notion of S-D logic to develop a better understanding of customers’ and providers’ co-creation activities within B2B solutions markets. The next section introduces the customer solutions concept within business to business (B2B) markets and elaborates further on its embodiment in the service-dominant logic of marketing.

2.3 Section Two: Customer Solutions Concept

Although this study is concerned with the marketing aspect of the customer solutions topic³, it is important, first, to review the concept of customer solutions and its main

³ This will be reviewed in the third section of this chapter

characteristics. Therefore, this section provides a comprehensive background to the development of the customer solutions concept in the context of business markets. It begins by outlining some product and market offerings that have contributed to evolving the customer solutions concept. Subsequently, the customer solutions concept and its main cornerstones are highlighted. In doing so, the relevance of applying the service dominant logic of marketing to the customer solutions concept is highlighted. Finally, customer solutions drivers and outcomes are next reviewed.

2.3.1 Product Bundling

“Commodity bundling” or “product bundling” refers to “*grouping related products together into a unified market offering that is intended to be more attractive than separate, individual products*” (Lawless 1991, p.267). Prior bundling literature has distinguished between product bundling and price bundling concepts. While product bundling requires integration in a bundle’s components which might add value to consumers (e.g., telecom bundle of data and minutes provides convenience), price bundling is selling the bundle at a discount which does not require integration in the components of the bundle offering (e.g., variety packs of cereals) (Stremersch and Tellis, 2002). It is argued that firms utilise price bundling to induce customer demand as a promotional tool whereas product bundling is recognised as a more differentiated strategy for a firm’s products (Stremersch and Tellis, 2002).

The previous literature on bundling has suggested that product bundling as a marketing strategy enhances a firm’s competitive advantage, product differentiation and increases customer value (Paun, 1993). Yet, bundling is often perceived as a less risky strategy and does not require much cost to be created (Eppen, Hanson and Martin, 1991). As a result, product bundling enables companies to augment revenues by capturing the so-called consumers’ surplus (Schmalensee 1984, p. 211). However, the product bundling strategy has been criticised for looking at customers as a homogeneous group (Porter, 2008), as this strategy leans on combining standardised products and services in packages to all potential buyers, irrespective of the differences in their core needs. Whereas the majority of the extant literature on bundling focuses on a B2C context, using a bundling approach in a B2B context extends the bundling concept and acknowledges the difference in customers’ needs by creating full-service offerings that

are “*comprehensive bundles of products and/or services, that fully satisfy the needs and wants of a customer related to a specific event or problem*” (Stremersch et al. 2001, p.2). Having discussed the products bundling concept and its dominance in consumers markets, the second section will explain a different kind of product offering that has emerged within the context of the industrial marketing context.

2.3.2 *Systems Selling*

Early research in industrial marketing management introduced the concept of system selling and system marketing approaches, stressing that system suppliers should take an active part in solving their customers’ problems (Mattsson, 1973; Page and Siemplenski, 1983). System selling involves providing integrated components of a system rather than offering one individual component (product selling) of that system (Mattsson, 1973). Accordingly, system selling was defined as “*a combination of products and services, a fulfilment of a more extended customer need than is the case in product selling*” (Mattsson, 1973, p.108). Initially, the system selling approach prevailed in industries that are characterised by a high degree of systems sophistication such as aerospace and data processing industries (Hannaford, 1976). Selling a system begins by identifying customers’ problems precisely, followed by integrating systems components effectively (Paliwoda and Bonaccorsi, 1993). While systems’ components in a system selling approach were not customised to each customer, the systems sold were viewed as standardised and integrated products and services that are “*adjusted to the individual customer’s needs of some basic problem solution ideas*” (Mattsson, 1973, p.109).

Prior research on system selling has also discussed how the system selling approach impacts on the relationship between the buyers and suppliers. For instance, Hannaford (1976) suggested that mutual trust and cooperation should underpin the relationship between systems providers and their business customers in order to ensure effective systems implementation. Prior literature has also reported various benefits suppliers can gain when shifting towards system selling. For instance, system selling increases customer switching costs (Paliwoda and Bonaccorsi, 1993) and improves the product differentiation and yields higher profit margins (Mattson, 1973; Page and Siemplenski

1983). This product differentiation is achieved by a higher degree of integration between a system's components which makes it difficult to be imitated by other competitors (Mattson, 1973).

While the system selling approach demonstrates the features of an industrial offering, there appeared to be a need to redefine the role of salespeople in industrial sellers. For instance, the concept of consultative selling (Wotruba, 1980; Dunn, Thomas and Lubawski, 1981) appeared to emphasise that industrial selling should be seen as a professional process. It has been argued that salespersons should adopt the role of consultants who demonstrate their ability to understand customers' core businesses and diagnose their specific needs. As a result, *"the company is no longer represented by salespeople, but by professional consultants who sell"* (Dunn et al. 1981 p. 59). In this sense, industrial sales people are viewed as marketing managers and leaders who assist their customers in articulating their specific problems and needs as well as designing tailor-made offers which suit each individual customer (Wotruba, 1991). Having evolved from over three decades ago, it is worth noting that consultative selling has recently been recognised as an important selling approach in performing the co-creation process where the role of the sales force is transforming to *"explore new ways of creating value, novel relationship models and innovative supplier-customer governing mechanisms"* (Marcos Cuevas, 2018, p.8).

In summary, the reviewed product offerings and selling approaches have considerably paved the way for industrial marketing research to elaborate further on the way in which suppliers communicate and extend their offerings with their business customers. Therefore, the B2B marketing literature has shown a notable interest in how industrial marketers create value for their customers through highlighting the concept of so-called *"customer solutions."* The next subsection discusses the concept of customer solutions, its definition, characteristics and outcomes in detail.

2.3.3 Evolving the Customer Solutions Concept

Although the system selling literature was not developed consistently after the work of Mattson (1973) (Page and Siemplenski, 1983), according to Cova and Salle (2007) the roots of customer solutions can be traced back to the system selling concept which emphasises suppliers need to offer an integrated system rather than discrete components, responding to the rapid change of customers' needs (Cova and Salle, 2007).

However, the concept of customer solutions firstly appeared in the managerial literature at the end of 1990 as the conceptualisations and viewpoints of experienced managers and consultants (e.g., McKinsey; Booz, Allen and Hamilton). These viewpoints emphasise that achieving competitive advantage is no longer achieved by providing stand-alone services and goods but, rather, by combining and integrating these components into a way that creates a high value to business customers through addressing their specific business needs (Sharma and Molloy, 1999; Foote et al., 2001; Roehrich and Caldwell, 2012).

The shift to offering customer solutions should not be viewed as a business model that is only relevant to manufacturing or product-based industries but also to service-based industries such as software-based companies. The prior literature has given real examples of how some of the world's leading manufacturing and services-based firms have distinctly shifted to provide customer solutions. For example, IBM, General Electric, Rolls-Royce, Ericson and EDS have made the strategic change from selling stand-alone products and services to offering integrated solutions to their customers (Davies, Brady and Hobday, 2006). Table 2.2 serves as an example into how these global firms changed their offerings from simply offering standardised goods and services in 1995 into offering integrated solutions to their business customers in the following decade.

Table 2.2: *Examples of the shift to customer solutions*

Company	Traditional Product or Service Focus (1995)	Integrated Solutions (2003)
Alstom Transport - Railways	Products: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subsystems (e.g., propulsion, drive, electronic information systems) • Rolling stock • Signalling and train control system 	Transport solutions (e.g., train availability) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems integrator–turnkey solutions for project management, fixed infrastructure, and finance • Services for maintenance, renovation, parts replacement and service products – “Total Train-Life Management”

Ericsson - Mobile Communications Systems	<p>Products:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile handsets • Mobile system • Subsystem products: radio base stations, base station controllers, mobile switches, operating systems, and customer databases 	<p>Turnkey solutions to design, build and operate mobile phone networks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile systems—complete supplier, systems integrator and partner • Global services – services and business consulting to support a customer’s network operations
Thales Training & Simulation – Flight Simulation	<p>Products – stand-alone flight simulators for commercial and military aircraft</p>	<p>Training solutions (e.g., “pay as you train”):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems integration • Training services: networked training, independent training centres for training services and synthetic training environments
WS Atkins – Infrastructure and the Built Environment	<p>Engineering consultancy, project management and technical services for infrastructure projects</p>	<p>Integrated solutions for the built environment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The design, build, finance and operation of infrastructure across industrial sectors • Total Solutions for Industry (TS4i) provides one-stop-shop for design, construction maintenance, and finance
<p>Cable & Wireless Global Markets –</p> <p>Business Telecom Network</p>	<p>Providing “managed network services” for multinational corporations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network design • Supply telecom infrastructure and applications • Network management 	<p>Providing global outsourcing solutions for a multinational corporation’s entire telecom and IT needs on a global basis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network design • Telecom infrastructure and applications • Network management • Ownership of the network • Network operation • Business-process applications • Service level agreements
BDP – architectural and engineering design services for the built environment	<p>Providing integrated design architectural and engineering design of buildings either directly for a client or to a prime contractor through a design / build approach</p>	<p>Involvement in identifying pre-project requirements for potential facilities, such as schools, development of delivery plans and mechanisms including financial and risk analysis and consortia building. Joint equity partner in project. Design, build, operate, and maintain activities once facility has been delivered.</p>

Source: Brady, Davies and Gann (2005, p.362)

Extant literature uses different terms to describe the term *solutions*. For instance, some scholars adopt the term *integrated solutions* (e.g., Brax and Jonsson, 2009; Roehrich and Caldwell, 2012) or *customer solutions* (e.g., Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj (2007); Biggemann et al. 2013) or *full service* (e.g., Stremersch et al. 2001) or *business solutions* (e.g., Prior, 2015; Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016) or *hybrid offerings* (e.g. Schaarschmidt, Walsh, and Evanschitzky, 2017; Ulaga and Reinartz, 2011). Although all these terms have been used interchangeably among solutions scholars, the customer solutions concept has been defined differently as shown in table 2.3.

Table 2.3: *Current definitions of solutions*

Source	Extract
Dunn and Thomas (1994, p.35)	Partnership solutions: multiple business solutions linked across the corporation to address a strategic problem impacting the entire enterprise. Product solution: product plus application and services.
Hax and Wilde (1999, p.13)	Customer solutions: a wider offering of products and services that satisfies most if not all the customer's needs.
Stremersch, Wuyts and Frambach (2001, p.2)	Full service is a comprehensive bundle of products and/or services that fully satisfy the needs and wants of a customer related to a specific event or a problem.
Miller et al. (2002, p.3)	Solutions are integrated combinations of products and/or services that are unusually tailored to create outcomes desired by specific clients or types of clients.
Galbraith, (2002, p.196)	Personalised packages of service, support, education, and consulting.
Sawhney (2006, p.369)	An integrated combination of products and services customised for a set of customers that allows customers to achieve better outcomes than the sum of the individual components.
Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj (2007, p.1)	A set of customer-supplier relational processes comprising (1) customer requirements definition, (2) customisation and integration of goods and/or services and (3) their deployment, and (4) post-deployment customer support, all of which are aimed at meeting customers' business needs.
Brax and Jonsson (2009, p.541)	A bundle of physical products, services and information, seamlessly combined to provide more value than the parts alone, that addresses customer needs in relation to a specific function or

task in their business system; it is long-term oriented, integrates the provider as a part of the customer's business system, and aims at optimising the total cost for the customer.

Evanschitzky, Wangenheim and Woisetschläger, (2011, p.657)	An ongoing relational process, in which the solution provider continuously satisfies a defined demand, which may be dynamically developing over time.
(Macdonald et al., 2016, p.114)	The combining of supplier and customer processes and resources through a joint resource integration process to create collective and individual value in use.

Source: (Authors' own)

The above table illustrates the theoretical development of the customer solutions concept. For example, Stremersch, Wuyts and Frambach (2001, p.2) use the term full service and define it as “*a comprehensive bundle of products and/or services that fully satisfy the needs and wants of a customer related to a specific event or a problem.*” Other definitions emphasise the outcomes that customers gain from solutions compared to stand-alone goods and services. For instance, Sawhney (2006, p.369) defines customer solutions as “*an integrated combination of products and services customized for a set of customers that allows customers to achieve better outcomes than the sum of the individual components*”. However, these early definitions only emphasise the providers' views of customer solutions by stressing solutions as being a combination of integrated goods and services. Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj (2007) are among the first scholars to challenge the providers' view of customer solutions and, thus, propose a new definition that emphasises how customers think about these solutions. In their seminal paper, “*Rethinking customer solutions: from product bundles to relational processes*”, in the Journal of Marketing, Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj (2007, p.5) define the customer solutions concept as “*a set of customer-supplier relational processes comprising (1) customer requirement definition, (2) customisation and integration of goods and/or services and (3) their deployment, and (4) post-deployment customer support*”.

Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj's (2007) emphasis on the relational process underscores the S-D framework which calls for a shift from a product centric to process and

relationships thinking (FP8, Table 2.1). In this sense, a customer solution implies that providers need to create personalised interactions (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004) with their customers to understand what their problems and needs are, and fulfil them with the best solution offerings. Therefore, this study adopts this definition and apply the theoretical lens of value co-creation trajectories to understand how suppliers and customers apply and integrate their resources within low customer readiness solutions markets.

Subsequently, the largest proportion of studies on customer solutions have adopted the S-D framework in their definition of the concept, aiming at advancing the relational process of customer solutions. For example, Evanschitzky, Wangenheim and Woisetschläger, (2011, p.657) define customer solutions as “*an ongoing relational process, in which the solution provider continuously satisfies a defined demand, which may be dynamically developing over time.*” More recently, Macdonald et al. (2016, p.114) have underpinned the customer solutions concept with the theoretical foundation of S-D logic of marketing, defining it as “*the combining of supplier and customer processes and resources through a joint resource integration process to create collective and individual value in use*”. This definition centres the value co-creation notion (FP6, Table 2.1) and customers’ shift to value-in-use (FP10, Table 2.1) at the heart of the customer solutions concept.

Together, these definitions, quoted in (Table 2.3), suggest that three main cornerstones of what constitutes a customer solution can be derived. Figure 2.2 presents these three cornerstones of customer solution concept followed by a brief explanation of each element. These cornerstones are underpinned by the collaborative processes (value co-creation) embedded in customer solutions, reflecting the relational view of this concept (Evanschitzky, Wangenheim and Woisetschläger, 2011; Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016). Collectively, these cornerstones are consistent with the S-D logic of marketing that argues for a shift to interactions and processes and breaking free from the goods and services debates.

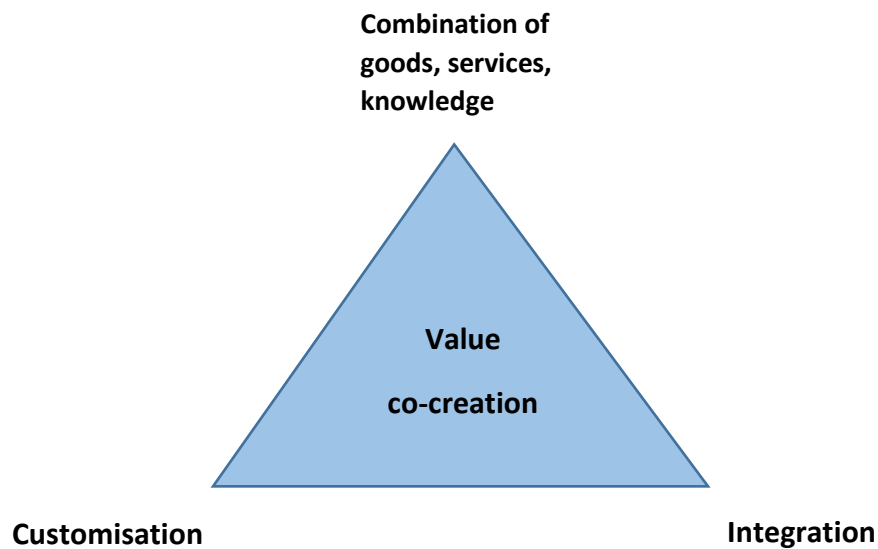


Figure 2.1: The three cornerstones of customer solutions concept (own figure)

- **Combination of goods and services:** A solution implies the provision of both goods and services elements rather than one of these exclusively (Brady, Davies and Gann, 2005; Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Nordin and Kowalkowski, 2010). This combination enables solutions providers to create innovative offerings that can add higher value than selling solutions components separately (e.g. Dhar, Menon and Maach, 2004; Sawhney, 2006; Brax and Jonsson, 2009). Indeed, such combination of goods and services to provide solutions strongly resonates with the third foundational premises (FP3, table 2.1) of the S-D that stresses “*Goods are distribution mechanisms for service provision*” (Vargo and Lusch, 2004a).
- **Customisation:** the customisation aspect denotes that solutions offerings are customised to fit into each customer business process (Miller et al., 2002; Davies, 2004). This can be achieved through the personalised interactions during the co-creation process where the supplier collects rich insights and input from the customer about their needs and problems, allowing them to provide more customised solutions, which are pertinent to the customer business process.

Although extant solutions provision literature has predominantly emphasised the importance of the customisation element of a solution to each individual customer (e.g., Anderson and Narus, 1995; Matthyssens and Vandenbempt, 1998; Hax and Wilde, 1999; Davies, Brady and Hobday, 2007), the degree to which these solutions are customised depends mainly on the nature of the markets, industries and customers' sophistication, (Davies, Brady and Hobday, 2006). For instance, less sophisticated customers require less complex and highly standardised solution offerings than highly customised solutions (Davies, Brady and Hobday, 2007; Ceci and Prencipe, 2008; Kowalkowski, 2008).

Nevertheless, in order to achieve economic viability and succeed in solutions business, Storbacka *et al.* (2013) argue that solutions providers should seek a balance between tailoring solutions to business customers with the need to create repeatable and standardised solutions. Offering such standardised solutions can be achieved by adopting a “*modularisation*” process (Lampel and Mintzberg, 1996, p. 26) where suppliers create a standardised basic design that can serve a group of customers without the need to customise a basic design to every customer. In this sense, the customisation process occurs at the configuration and implementation level for every individual customer. Hence, such standardised solutions enable providers to extend their solutions offerings to different customer groups, reducing the likelihood of financial loss that might arise from customising solutions from scratch for every single customer (Davies, Brady and Hobday, 2006; Biggemann et al., 2013).

- **Integration:** This element refers to “*the degree to which products and services within a single offer are interrelated to deliver value beyond the sum of the parts*” (Krishnamurthy, Johansson and Schlissberg, 2003, p3). In this sense, customer solutions are not merely bundling goods and services which can be unbundled by customers. This integration creates a better organisational outcome than the sum of the individual goods and services (Nordin and Kowalkowski, 2010). Sawhney (2006) points out that the integration aspect of customer solutions provides the customer with two types of value: operational integration and marketing integration. The operational integration value is derived from interoperability between components which distinguish solutions from any other offers (Matthyssens and

Vandenbempt, 2008; Brax and Jonsson, 2009). However, the marketing value from the integration element is achieved through creating a “one-stop shop” that allows customers to source all the solutions elements from one single supplier (Sawhney, 2006).

Because offering customer solutions requires solutions providers to possess an in-depth customer knowledge and insights into their business process, a high degree of interconnectedness between the provider and customer is required throughout the process of creating and delivering these solutions (Windahl and Lakemond, 2006). Hence, the relational view of customer solutions has emerged (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Brax and Jonsson, 2009; Evanschitzky, Wangenheim and Woisetschläger, 2011; Ulaga and Reinartz, 2011; Smith, Maull and CL Ng, 2014) to underscore the need for a close cooperation between the customer and the supplier when developing and implementing customer solutions.

Overall it can be concluded that customer solutions concept embodies the new dominant logic of marketing in the sense that suppliers move from trying to find customers for their products and services, that is G-D logic, to S-D logic where companies try to find as many innovative combinations as possible of products and services to fulfil customers’ requirements through ongoing interactive processes (Galbraith, 2002; Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Sawhney, 2006). Value co-creation thought has been perceived as a useful framework to understand how the supplier and customer engage in such collaborative process to create effective customer solutions (e.g., Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Petri and Jacob, 2016).

Thus far, this section has defined the customer solutions concept and demonstrated the relevance of the service dominant framework in studying the marketing aspect of this concept. The next subsection reviews extant literature on customer solutions drivers and outcomes.

2.3.4 Drivers and Outcomes of Customer Solutions

Extant customer solutions literature demonstrates various drivers that have led a vast number of provider firms to adopt customer solutions as a strategic marketing approach. These drivers appear to be varied based on industries (Biggemann et al., 2013) and have been attributed to internal and external variables (Nordin and Kowalkowski,

2010). Generally, the shift to providing customer solutions is driven by four major factors (figure 2.3) including commoditisation, changing in customer demand, advanced technology and, finally, changes in market structures and deregulations.

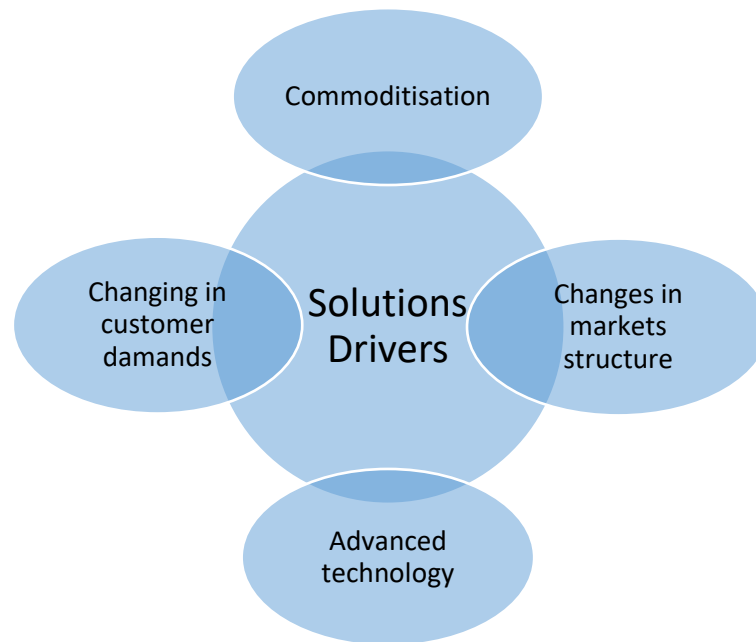


Figure 2.2: Customer solutions drivers

First, commoditisation which has been defined as a “*dynamic process that erodes the competitive differentiation potential and consequently deteriorates the financial position of any organisation*” (Matthyssens and Vandenbempt 2008, p317). In this sense, competing by offering traditional goods and services is seen as a less differentiating offering (Ulaga and Eggert, 2006; Eggert et al., 2018) and, consequently, will negatively influence suppliers’ growth and their profit margins (Windahl et al., 2004). Therefore, offering customer solutions that add a unique value to the customer enables providers to differentiate their offerings as well as resisting the “*commodity magnet*” (Rangan and Bowman, 1992; Stremersch, Wuyts and Frambach, 2001; Ulaga and Kohli, 2018).

Secondly, changes in customer demands have been widely recognised as a prime driver of emerging customer solutions (Sharma and Molloy, 1999). Business customers are increasingly seeking an integrated and customised solution, as opposed to standalone goods and services which only partially fulfil their needs (Stremersch, Wuyts and Frambach, 2001; Eggert et al., 2018). Ulaga and Kohli

(2018) argue that solutions customers are shifting to buy value and, therefore, they are likely to look at the end results or performance commitment from their solutions providers.

Thirdly, the development of ICT has been largely recognised as an enabler in developing service-oriented processes and new solutions (Penttinen and Palmer, 2007; Kowalkowski, Kindström and Gebauer, 2013). Intelligent technologies, including software and hardware, enhance suppliers' capabilities to employ these tools effectively in customer operations and, thus, achieving better value-in-use (Windahl et al., 2004).

Finally, the trend of privatisation and liberalisation of markets in many countries across the world has considerably contributed to the emerging customer solutions concept (Cova and Salle, 2007). For example, the privatisation of the railway industry in the UK has urged Alstoms Transport Railways to develop new services which have then been integrated with products to provide a complete transport solution (Davies, 2004). Table 2.4 summarises the main drivers of customer solutions appearing in the extant literature.

Table 2.4: *Drivers of customer solutions*

Source	Extract
Shepherd and Ahmed (2000, p100)	To counter the effects of decreasing technology and product life cycles, tightening margins and increasing commoditisation of product components.
(Hax and Wilde (2001, p382)	Companies seek an intimate and deep customer understanding and relationships that allow them to develop value propositions that bond to each individual customer.
(Stremersch, Wuyts and Frambach (2001, p2)	Industrial firms increasingly demand “turnkey” solutions to problems instead of products that only partially solve their needs.

(Miller et al. (2002, p3)	Pressures from declining margins for manufactured products and demands from powerful customers wanting to out-source to focus on core competencies. The attractiveness of solutions growth opportunities and profit margins.
Dhar, Menon and Maach, (2004, p258)	Customers are increasingly focused on the question, ‘Can you provide me something for my problem in my industry that can tangibly demonstrate the ability to improve my return on investment in this case?’
Windahl et al. (2004, p218)	Slow growth and declining margins are putting pressure on firms to search for new businesses. “Intelligent” technology enables a continuous optimisation of customer operations. Changes in markets and customers represent another set of opportunities.
Sawhney (2006, p366)	Product differentiation based on features is difficult to sustain in the face of intense global competition.
Windahl and Lakemond (2006, p806)	Firms that have traditionally focused on selling products, spare parts, and services face difficulties with increasing competition and declining margins.
Matthyssens and Vandenbempt (2008, p316)	Commoditisation erodes the competitive differentiation of companies and often leads to a profit squeeze.
Skarp and Gadde (2008, p725)	The supplier’s ultimate aim in upgrading is to become a more attractive business partner in relation to the customers.

Source: (Authors’ own)

On the other hand, customer solutions bring significant outcomes for customers and suppliers alike. For the solutions providers, if a balance between solutions customisation and standardisation that provides solutions repeatability is successfully achieved, offering solutions contributes towards increasing the profit margins for suppliers and enables them to regain the cost of developing and customising these solutions

(Stremersch, Wuyts and Frambach, 2001; Leff Bonney and Williams, 2009; Sharma and Iyer, 2011). Additionally, solutions providers also yield non-financial benefits from providing solutions such as the knowledge they acquire from handling different business customers' problems (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). Consequently, this "know how" capability enables solutions providers to expand their markets and serve their potential customers more effectively.

In turn, while it has been argued that evaluating the outcome of customer solutions seems to be relatively difficult as it depends on how clear the problem a customer has is (Nordin and Kowalkowski, 2010), extant literature reports various customers' outcomes when buying customised solutions. As "*solutions are about outcomes that make life easier or better for the client*" (Miller et al., 2002, p.3), it also aims at solving a customer's problem (Ceci and Prencipe, 2008). Recent empirical studies have found two forms of outcomes perceived by customers when buying and using these solutions (value-in-use). Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola (2012) suggest that solutions generally provide customers with monetary and non-monetary values. While economic benefits entail reducing costs and/or increasing revenues, non-economic benefits encompass operational values such as solutions reliability and social and emotional values like sense of relief and self-confidence perceived by individuals involved in buying solutions and customer users (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Prior, 2013). Collectively, Mustak (2017) has recently found that providers and customers equally perceive four intertwined categories of perceived value: functional (e.g., better customisation), economic (e.g., cost saving and increasing revenues), relational (e.g., mutual trust and commitment) and strategic benefits (e.g., stronger market position).

2.3.5 Research Streams of Customer Solutions Topic and the Focus of this Study

The topic of customer solutions has been investigated from multiple perspectives. Research streams including operations (e.g., Brax and Jonsson, 2009), marketing (e.g., Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016), strategy (e.g., Sharma, Lucier and Molloy, 2002), innovation management (e.g., Shepherd and Ahmed, 2000; Raja et al., 2013) and pricing management (e.g., Bonnemeier, Burianek and Reichwald, 2010; Frandsen, Boa and Raja, 2019)

A significant amount of customer solutions research has been dedicated to understand the types of capabilities suppliers need to develop and adopt when they move to provide customer solutions. This stream of research has identified several organisational capabilities necessary to succeed in the solutions business. Examples of such capabilities are: systems integration, operational services, business consultancy and financial services (Davies et al. 2006), new revenue and pricing models (Bonnemeier, Burianek and Reichwald, 2010), networking, relational and mastering the customer business capabilities (Möller and Törrönen, 2003), reconfiguration of existing capabilities (Cornet et al., 2000; Brax and Jonsson, 2009), defining customer solutions value proposition (Ballantyne et al., 2011), transformation into professional selling (Cuevas, 2018) and solutions business models capabilities (Storbacka, 2011). In the meantime, the servitisation literature (Vandermerwe and Rada, 1988; Oliva and Kalenbergh, 2003) has appeared to overlap with customer solutions. Servitisation research primarily examines the service growth of manufacturing-based companies through incorporating services into their offerings and thereby providing customer solutions (e.g., Windahl et al., 2004; Baines et al., 2017; Kowalkowski, Gebauer and Oliva, 2017).

Surprisingly, however, although business customers are the primary focus of solutions business, the aspect of how customers and providers interact and co-create solutions activities within solutions marketing research has been addressed by only a few scholars (e.g., Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011; Petri and Jacob, 2016). This can be attributed to two main reasons: (1) the concept of customer solutions as a business model and strategic option has appeared distinctly in the literature only in the beginning of the twentieth-first century. (2) Early research, viewpoints and conceptualisations on customer solutions have focused on defining the concept from a strategic perspective and how large manufacturing companies move to provide integrated solutions rather than discrete goods and services (e.g., Sharma and Molloy, 1999; Shepherd and Ahmed, 2000; Foote et al., 2001; Miller et al., 2002; Davies, 2004; Brady, Davies and Gann, 2005a).

Only recently, solutions marketing research within (B2B) settings has begun to appear in the current literature and, thus, there is a consensus among solutions marketing scholars that this is a nascent area of research (Nordin and Kowalkowski, 2010;

Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Ostrom et al., 2015; Macdonald, Klein-altenkamp and Wilson, 2016; Windler et al., 2016). In the meantime, the emerging S-D logic of marketing has offered an interesting opportunity to advance this research through examining how firms can market with customers, exploring how both parties share and integrate their resources and, most importantly, how value is being assessed and experienced. This study positions itself among this stream of research and draws on value co-creation trajectories to understand the collaborative process embedded in solutions exchanges in a LCRM context.

This section has attempted to provide a brief summary of the literature relating to the customer solutions concept and its hallmarks. It has also elaborated how the customer solution concept embodies the S-D logic of marketing and, thus, establishes the relevance of this framework to this study. The next section presents the solutions marketing aspect which serves as the primary focus of this thesis. Subsequently, solutions marketing research gaps will be highlighted, leading to formulation of the research questions.

2.4 Section Three: Solutions Marketing

The solutions marketing process can be conceptualised as the reciprocal interactions that occur between solutions providers and their customers before, during and after solutions implementation (Nordin and Kowalkowski, 2010; Petri and Jacob, 2016). This process depicts a problem-solving situation where suppliers aim at understanding customers' business processes in order to offer the best solution offering that solves their business problems (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012).

Davies, Brady and Hobday (2007) outline customer solutions process as follows:

- Provide an in-depth analysis of a customer's business.
- Identify and diagnose problems in a customer's organisation.
- Offer solutions based on its experience of working with some customers facing similar situations.
- Coordinate the integration of components into a solution.

The suggested process, above, emphasises that providers need to work closely with their customers to provide them with optimal solutions. Nevertheless, the process

suggested by Davies, Brady and Hobday's (2007) remains, from the providers' view and, thus, customer input on such solutions were not integrated into a unified solutions marketing process. Brax and Jonsson (2009, p.555) stress the need to include customer input when studying customer solutions, "*The wide emphasis on customer focus should lead to the increasing involvement of customers in integrated solutions research*". As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj (2007) are among the first scholars to address this gap by incorporating customers' views to the solutions providers' view of customer solutions. This has resulted in the emergence of the relational view of customer solutions within the solutions marketing research. The next subsection explains this relational view in detail.

2.4.1 *Relational View of Customer Solutions*

Based on in-depth interviews from a dyadic perspective within the information technology, health care, real estate and financial services sectors, Tuli and colleagues (2007), in their seminal paper, found that customers' and suppliers perceive customer solutions differently. While suppliers view solutions as integration and customisation of products and services, customers perceive solutions as a set of customer-supplier relational processes. Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj's (2007) process consists of four linear customer-supplier relational phases, demonstrating the customers' and suppliers' interactions involved in developing and implementing customer solutions. Figure 2.3 shows the relational process of customer solutions.

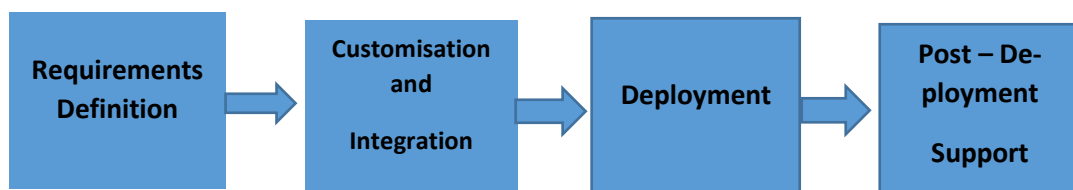


Figure 2.3: Relational view of customer solutions

(Source: Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007)

This process starts by defining and identifying the customers' requirements followed by customisation and integration of a solution, then its deployment and, finally, post-

deployment support. Given that there is a consensus among solutions marketing scholars that the relational process of customer solutions mirrors the value co-creation notion of S-D logic (e.g., Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola; Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp, and Wilson; Eggert et al., 2018), the term of value co-creation phases of customer solutions will be used in this thesis to denote the relational process, reflecting the theoretical development of the relational process and value co-creation literature. Further explanation of the relational process and the theoretical development associated with this process is reviewed next.

- **Definition of Customer Requirements**

The first joint interactive phase of solutions co-creation is the requirements' definition where providers and customers engage in an exclusive relationship to identify customers' problems and formulate a view about the solution offering (Töllner et al., 2011; Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj (2007). However, it is important to highlight that this process is not an easy task for customers and suppliers because customers are often unable to articulate their complex business needs and problems (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Nordin and Kowalkowski, 2010). Therefore, it has been argued that solutions providers have to spend more time with customers through sales personnel (Leff Bonney and Williams, 2009), asking customers the right questions (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007) in order to diagnose customers' specific needs.

Value co-creation of S-D logic posits that customers and suppliers are resource integrators in service exchanges (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Payne, Storbacka and Frow, 2008). Consistent with this view, suppliers and customers are jointly required to leverage their necessary resources and skills to help to articulate exact customer requirements in solutions exchanges. For instance, suppliers leverage their diagnosis skills resources that enable them in identifying the exact customer requirements (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola). Similarly, customers at this phase have to leverage their operant resources such as information on their solutions goals, budget, requirements and schedule (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Petri and Jacob, 2016).

- **Customisation and Integration**

The second phase of the solutions value co-creation process embodies the second and third cornerstones of the customer solutions concept discussed in Figure 2.2. After identifying customer requirement in the first phase, solutions providers aim at developing and selecting the optimal mix of goods and services that fit with the customer business requirements (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011). Indeed, the customisation aspect of the solutions value co-creation process has long been recognised as a strategic approach in B2B marketing (e.g., Matthyssens and Vandenbempt, 1998). According to Anderson and Narus (1995, p76), customisation of the business offering is needed as a “*one size will not fix all*”, implying that customers’ requirements are varied even if these customers are in the same market segment. Thus, as indicated earlier in this chapter (section 2.3.3), solutions offerings typically require different levels of customisation based on the complexity of the need of the customer and the solution itself (Ceci and Prencipe, 2008). After choosing the best combination of goods and services that fulfils the defined solution requirement, providers seek to install the solution into the customer’s premises.

- **Solutions Deployment**

Solution deployment refers to the implementation phase in which a solution provider delivers and installs the solution offering into a customer’s processes (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011). In the meantime, the solutions providers may need to reconsider some modifications with regard to solutions customisation and integration if such amendments are necessary to ensure that the solution runs smoothly. Additionally, providing some training to the customer firm’s users is imperative to ensure that a customer can use the solution effectively and utilise value-in-use (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007). The last phase in the relational view of customer solution highlights the ongoing relational process between suppliers and their business customers.

- **Post-deployment Support**

The S-D logic of marketing postulates that service exchange is customer-oriented and relational (FP8, Table 2.1). The empirical findings of solutions marketing research strongly corroborate with this view, theorising the solutions relationship as a long-term orientation (Miller et al., 2002; Ulaga and Reinartz, 2011) which leads to higher

dependency and interconnectedness between supplier and customer (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007). Therefore, after solutions deployment, the supplier needs to continuously maintain their relationship with customers by addressing their emerging needs which might change over the period of a solution's life cycle (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007).

2.4.2 *Extending the Value Co-Creation Phases of Customer Solutions*

Following the work of Tuli and colleagues (2007), Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller (2011) sought to test the value co-creation phases in the capital goods industry (e.g., material handling system) where the complexity of offerings and products are relatively high (Hobday, 1998). While their results significantly support the four phases explained above, they have extended the initial process by incorporating two important phases as perceived by solutions customers. The first incremental stage is called “*signalling*” which precedes the customer requirement definition identified earlier by Tuli and colleagues. Signalling activity refers to some considerations taken by industrial buyers before selecting a certain supplier (Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011). Signalling activity is deemed to be important to the customers' firms due to the high degree of risk associated with solutions offerings. These risks are related to the financial impact of a solution, delivery conditions, and performance (Skarp and Gadde, 2008).

Thus, the signalling phase involves suppliers' ability to demonstrate their guarantee, proficiency, risk mitigation and commitment to create effective solutions. At this phase, customers evaluate various potential solution suppliers, and the winning supplier is the one who fulfils customer requirements and shows commitment during the following phases (Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011). The second additional relational process proposed by Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller's (2011) is related to how solutions providers organise their internal processes and communications while developing and implementing customer solutions. The process is termed “*inter-process management*” where customer firms expect their solutions providers to manage the entire relational process smoothly. Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller (2011) have found that this phase aims at integrating and coordinating all providers' efforts throughout all solutions value co-creation phases by considering four main sub-processes:

- **Coordination:** Industrial buyers in the capital goods industry prefer to deal with a solutions provider who is able to coordinate all sub-contractors involved in providing customers' solutions. Yet, coordination implies that the customers expect their solutions providers to limit their contacts to those who have a direct customer interface, in order to exchange information smoothly.
- **Time Management:** suppliers are required to leverage their project management skills by setting well-defined schedules and deadlines in order to implement solutions' development and deployment on time.
- **Incorporation and Improvement:** customers also expect their suppliers to respond to any modification and requirement which might appear during the process of developing and implementing the solutions. Hence, solutions providers in the capital goods industry are required to adapt to any changes that might happen when they deploy customer solutions.
- **Proactive Support:** to gain customers' trust, solutions providers are also required to offer constant help and support to their customers. For instance, customers expect their solutions providers to keep them aware of the potential risks that might arise from the solutions and how capable suppliers are of dealing with these risks effectively.

On the other hand, it must be noted that the value co-creation phases of customer solutions may not necessarily go linearly as Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj (2007) and Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller (2011) have suggested. For instance, Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola (2012) argue that value co-creation activities (e.g., diagnosing needs, designing and producing the solution, organising the process and resources, managing value conflicts, and implementing the solution within the knowledge-intensive business services (KIBS)⁴ solutions context do not constantly happen in a linear manner but, rather, may occur in a more diverse order. This is because developing and delivering KIBS involves complex exchanges that are highly characterised with a problem-solving approach, leading to an intense and complex interactive process (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). In particular, customers and providers may change their

⁴ According to Bettencourt et al. (2002), KIBS are business to business services where knowledge is used to develop customised solutions that solve customers' problems or address their specific needs.

interests in solutions aspects, returning them to the problem definition phase (Biggemann et al., 2013).

In their seminal paper entitled “*Value co-creation in knowledge-intensive business services: A dyadic perspective on the joint problem-solving process*”, Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola (2012) identify several roles performed and resources contributed by providers and customers involved in solutions exchange. Their research serves as an important framework to solutions marketing scholars as it was the first framework to draw on the value co-creation of S-D logic and which aims at explaining customers’ and providers’ processes and resources embedded in developing and implementing customer solutions. Their study has found that solutions providers draw on various resources including their expert knowledge, diagnosing skills, professionalism and objectivity and integrity. In turn, customers also leverage their resources including knowledge about their solutions requirements, industry knowledge, time and financial resources to create effective solutions value co-creation processes.

Grounding the solutions marketing literature in the value co-creation notion has created the impetus for solutions marketing scholars to advance the solutions value co-creation process through further elaboration on the provider and customer roles in this process. Focusing on the role of the customer in the value co-creation process, Petri and Jacob (2016) have recently enhanced the solution process conceptualisation defined by Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj (2007) and enhanced by Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller (2011) by adding the “*problem need definition*” element which precedes the signalling activity, suggesting that the early value co-creation phase in solutions marketing is customer-led. Specifically, they report that solutions customers first define the reasons that lead them to decide the provider is needed and, thus, initiate the solution relationship. These reasons include lack of capacity, methodological expertise, functional expertise, market insight and legitimation (Petri and Jacob, 2016). Accordingly, figure 2.4 integrates the initial work by Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj (2007), and enhanced by (Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011; Petri and Jacob, 2016), and presents the latest development of the academic work on value co-creation phases of customer solutions.

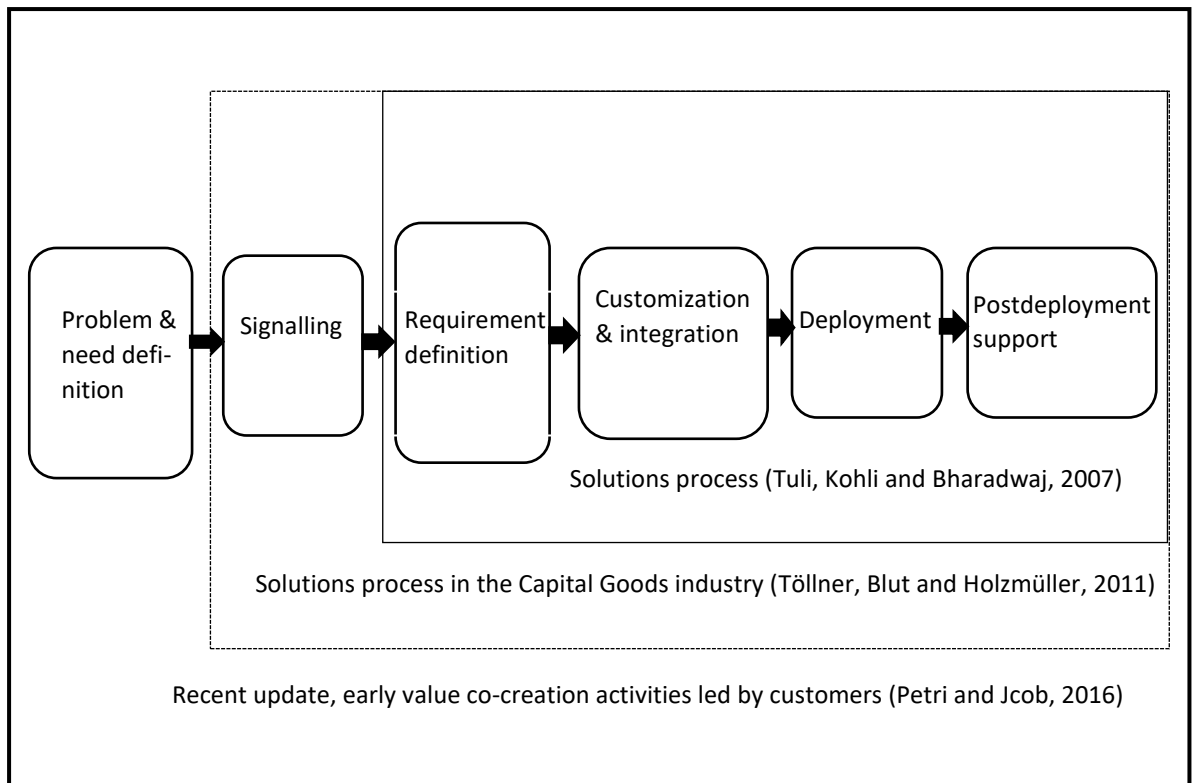


Figure 2.4: Recent development on value co-creation phases of customer solutions

Given that the value co-creation phases of customer solutions equally emphasise providers' and customers' contributions into the interactive process, it can be argued that developing and delivering an effective customer solution hinges on providers' and customers variables. Extant solutions marketing literature identify some suppliers and customers' variables that lead to developing and implementing effective and successful customer solutions. While suppliers' variables encompass contingent hierarchy, documentation emphasis, incentive externality, customer interactor stability and process articulation, customer variables include the ability to adapt a certain solution and information sharing with their suppliers (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007). Likewise, Powers, Sheng and Juan (2016) suggest that solutions providers' activities such as a client's requirements adaptive ability, customer emphasis and cross-functional coordination are of particular importance to enhance solutions performance. Also, shared relational activities such as joint problem solving, and conflict management have a considerable role in consolidating solutions' implementation (Powers et al., 2016).

On the other hand, the sales management and personal selling research stream have also contributed to the academic work on customer solutions. Panagopoulos, Rapp and

Ogilvie (2017, p.145) introduce and define the term of salesperson solution involvement as *“the degree to which a salesperson engages in activities that help his/her firm provide end-to-end solutions to the salesperson’s customer”*. Unlike the traditional personal selling approach where salespeople communicate an offer’s attributes and close the deal, selling customer solutions requires salespeople who are entrepreneurs in engaging in challenging dialogues where they identify customers’ latent needs and articulate novel solutions to these needs (Leff Bonney and Williams, 2009; Sharma and Iyer, 2011). In other words, salespeople are moving away from being persuasion experts to customer experts (Sharma and Syam, 2018).

Such recognition of the new role of the salespeople involved in selling customer solutions has attracted personnel selling scholars to understand the type of salespeople involved in selling customer solutions. For instance, Prior (2013) has examined suppliers’ representative activities which lead to successful solutions implementation in the context of complex industrial solutions. His study found that suppliers’ representative behaviours can significantly enhance the customer perceived value when performing activities such as communication, planning, risk management and coordination in an accurate and professional manner.

Additionally, Hakanen (2014) argues that the key account management (KAM) team is a knowledge integrator, the members of which acquire, assimilate and utilise knowledge in order to achieve effective value co-creation throughout various phases of the solutions marketing process. Prior (2016) has also found service worker personal resources including empathy, flexibility, and reputation affect the overall quality of the relationships with customers’ firms when implementing customer solutions. More recently, Ulaga and Kohli (2018) have argued that solutions salespersons are boundary spanners who manage the interface between suppliers and customers and, thus, reduce three types of uncertainties (i.e., need uncertainty, process uncertainty and outcome uncertainty) that arise and are perceived differently by customers and their solutions providers throughout solutions value co-creation phases. Finally, Panagopoulos, Rapp and Ogilvie (2017) have found that salespeople play a crucial role in increasing solutions sales performance.

Having defined and reviewed the theoretical developments on solutions value co-creation phases, the next subsection reviews previous academic work on how customer firms purchase and view the procurement function in solutions exchanges.

2.4.3 The Buying Centre and Customer Solutions

The literature reviewed concerning customer solutions drivers' showed that customers are highly likely to be looking at end to end solutions outcomes and performances (section 2.3.4). Such ultimate orientation by the procurement function of the solutions customers has a major influence on how customers source solutions offerings. As sourcing solutions are likely to cost customer firms a price premium compared to stand-alone goods or services due to the customisation element and high value expected value from these solutions (Johansson, Krishnamurthy and Schlissberg, 2003), the buying centre of the customer firm should apply the concept of total cost of ownership⁵ (TCO) in their purchasing decision. In consequence, the customer emphasis should be on performance outcomes (value-in-use) rather than focusing on the purchasing price and short term objectives (value-in-exchange) (Bonnemeier, Burianek and Reichwald, 2010; Windler et al., 2016).

In addition, because sourcing customer solutions may have an impact on different individuals (e.g., users and decision makers) of the customer's firm, it is vital to involve different buying centre roles to ensure an effective buying process and to eliminate conflicting requirements that may arise among these functions (Christian Kowalkowski, 2011; Stremersch et al., 2001; Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011). Extant research suggests that different members of the buying centre of industrial buyers have different influences upon the solutions value co-creation phases explained earlier. Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller (2011) have examined the impact of different members in the buying centre on each phase of the solution value co-creation processes as shown in Figure 2.5. Their study shows that while users⁶ of solutions are typically interested in the customization and deployment process, buyers⁷ are more involved in

⁵ TCO is a philosophy and purchasing tool which looks beyond the purchasing price of a solution to include many other related purchase factors such as the quality and delivery conditions and monetary savings throughout using that solution (Bhutta and Huq, 2002).

⁶ Users are those members of the organisation who use products and services (Webster and Wind, 1972).

⁷ Buyers are those with formal responsibility and authority for contracting with suppliers (Webster and Wind, 1972).

the signalling process which involves procurement tasks such as the selection of the solution provider, definition of the requirements and the ordering process (Stremersch, Wuyts and Frambach, 2001; Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011). Similarly, deciders⁸ are also jointly responsible with buyers for the tasks which are related to signalling processes to ensure selecting the right solution providers. However, the deciders are strongly responsible for inter-management processes across the whole lifecycle of solutions as well as being considered the main interface with their suppliers. Accordingly, deciders work closely with their solutions providers to mitigate any potential risks that might arise during the solution's lifetime (Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011).

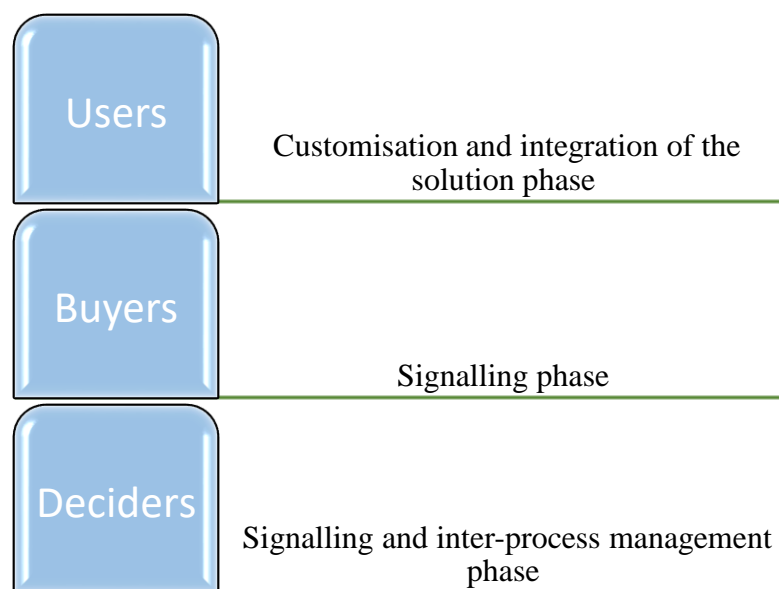


Figure 2.5: Variation in the relevance of solutions value co-creation phases across different roles in the buying centre

(Adapted from Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011)

To sum up, extant research on customer solutions suggest that solutions marketing and buying activities embedded in the value co-creation phases are characterised by a high degree of intensity and complexity. As stated by Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj (2007,

⁸ Deciders are those with authority to choose among alternative buying actions (Webster and Wind, 1972).

p.14) “*selling solutions is a complex exercise that involves the consideration of conflicting requirements of multiple stakeholders in a customer organization and sales cycles lasting up to two years.*” Having reviewed the extant academic work on solutions marketing, the next subsection presents research gaps and the research questions of this thesis.

2.4.4 Solutions Marketing Research Gaps and Research Questions’ Development

In spite of the growing volume of scholarly research on solutions value co-creation activities, there is a consensus among academic scholars (e.g. Sawhney, 2006; Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Brax and Jonsson, 2009; Nordin and Kowalkowski, 2010; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016; Eggert et al., 2018) that solutions marketing research is an extremely fertile area for academic researchers. As Jacob and Ulaga point out: “*there is a lack of concurrence in the marketing literature on the salient dimensions of a customer solution*” (Jacob and Ulaga 2008, p.252). Hence, the next subsections develop four distinct but interrelated gaps in current research where this study will make a contribution.

2.4.4.1 Customer solutions readiness and value co-creation

The first limitation concerns the types of customers where solutions have been studied. Extant work has largely drawn conclusions from empirical work focused on markets with high customer readiness [HCRM], assuming that customers are able to effectively operate and co-create value in solutions markets. Storbacka and Pennanen (2014: p123) define high customer readiness markets as: “*Markets with high readiness are characterized by customers’ ability to operate within the market: customers know how to obtain needed information about the actors in the market, are able to conduct the needed transactions, and are able to use the offering they purchase in their own processes*”. The key implication of HCRMs for solution providers is that the market for solutions is mature, and the provider can focus on enhancing their offering rather than engaging in market-developing activities.

Research designs have focused on the contexts of the European Union, USA, and Scandinavia. These studies predominantly assume that customers and providers operate as equal partners (e.g., Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Petri and Jacob,

2016), where customers are capable of performing their roles in value co-creation within customer solutions. Extant customer solutions literature identifies different criteria that characterise customers with high solutions market readiness. These criteria appear to shape customer readiness before, during and after the co-creation phases highlighted earlier (see Figure 2.4). Table 2.5 below presents criteria of high customer readiness within solutions markets.

Table 2.5: *Criteria of high customer readiness to operate within solutions markets*

Criteria of customer readiness to operate within solutions markets	Literature source
Willingness to pay for solutions.	(Evanschitzky, Wangenheim, and Woisetschläger, 2011; Windler, Jüttner, Michel, Maklan, and Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016)
The customer is able to define the objective and scope of the solution.	(Petri and Jacob, 2016)
The customer focus should be on total cost of ownership (TCO) rather than purchasing price.	(Kowalkowski, 2011; Windler et al., 2016)
Customer ability to provide operational counselling to the solution provider.	(Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Petri and Jacob, 2016)
Customers' ability to adopt solutions offerings into their processes and utilise solutions value-in-use.	(Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Storbacka and Pennanen, 2014)

Source: (Synthesised from previous research)

Therefore, integrating the criteria in Table 2.5 above with Storbacka and Pennanen's definition, the author of this thesis proposes that solutions customer readiness can be defined as *customers' willingness to invest and pay for solutions, apply and integrate their resources effectively in the co-creation, and adopt and utilise solutions value-in-*

use. Indeed, this definition adheres to the basic principle underlying by S-D logic which regards customers as active players in value creation (e.g., Payne, Storbacka and Frow, 2008). It also recognises different activities performed by the customer throughout solution value co-creation process which are important to achieve successful collaborative process and solutions implementation.

Against this backdrop, most researchers on the subject of solutions marketing have ignored examining value co-creation activities in low customer readiness markets [LCRMs]. There have been theoretical speculations about the assumption that customers are always ready and able to operate effectively within solutions markets and perform their roles autonomously in the co-creation process. Kowalkowski (2011) argues that customers' ability to actively operate within solution markets and their willingness to adopt the value-in-use perspective depends on their readiness. Extant solutions marketing research identifies some reasons that may limit customer readiness to operate effectively within solutions markets. These reasons appear to manifest customers' limitations before, during and after the solutions value co-creation phases discussed earlier in this chapter.

For instance, Kowalkowski (2011) argues that some customers may emphasise short-term transactions (value-in-exchange), to the extent that such short-term focus limits their abilities to evaluate the value obtained from solutions over the longer term (value-in-use). While their argument remains within the conceptual domain without identification of this type of customer, it can be proposed that customers in less mature and low-income markets may have such a characteristic at the early phase of the value co-creation process. Storbacka and Pennanen (2014) argue that if customers focus on the solutions price while providers focus on solution performance (value-in-use), an expected discrepancy among customers and their solutions providers may emerge on how solutions generate value, making solutions exchanges more challenging in such markets.

In addition, solutions markets with low customer readiness are expected to have high asymmetry between providers and customers' proficiency, and their skills and knowledge regarding solutions exchanges (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). Taking technology-based solutions originated in the information and communication solutions sector (ICT), for example where advanced technical and technology-based

knowledge is required (Miles et al., 1995; Ostrom et al., 2010), customers may not be aware of the latest technology and high-value solutions, thus limiting their ability to approach their solutions providers as extant literature suggests (e.g. Petri and Jacob, 2016). This asymmetry is most likely to emerge because “*marketers know more about their products and service than prospective buyers do*” (Mascarenhas, Kesavan and Bernacchi, 2008, p.68). Indeed, this suggests that customers may not have the necessary resources such as knowledge and skills they need to contribute and integrate, limiting their ability to fulfil their role in the co-creation.

As a result, the quality of operational counselling provided by such customers to their solutions providers is likely to be limited, negatively affecting solution effectiveness (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007). At the deployment and postemployment phase, extant theory emphasises that capturing value-in-use not only depends on providers’ solutions offerings but also on customers’ own skills to utilise such solutions (Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016). However, in low customer readiness solutions markets where customers have limited resources and skills, it can be argued that customers are more likely to be unable to use and adapt solutions purchased on their own effectively (Storbacka and Pennanen, 2014).

Such examples of potential customer lack of proficiency with solutions suggests that solution providers’ and customers’ roles embedded in value co-creation phases within solutions marketing need to be redefined in such LCRMs (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Storbacka and Pennanen, 2014). However, theoretically informed understanding of how value co-creation activities where customers have low-level solutions readiness remains scant in the extant literature.

This study proposes that studying such contexts in solutions research offers an opportunity for theory development in the solutions field; given that there is a consensus among authors that achieving successful value co-creation can be difficult if customers cannot effectively engage in the value co-creation process with their solutions providers (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; deLeon and Chatterjee, 2017). Hence, the first research question that this study attempts to answer is:

RQ1: *What influence, if any, does low customer readiness in solutions markets have on the role of the provider in the solutions value co-creation process?*

2.4.4.2 A homogeneous approach to the solutions value proposition

The second gap in the current solutions marketing research stems from lack of research into how solution providers communicate their solution value proposition into their business customers. This gap is resulting from the predominant focus on the linear value co-creation phases associated with developing and implementing customer solutions. As stated by Ballantyne et al., (2011, p.205):

“The idea that a relational processes view of customer solutions is the embodiment of S-D logic's co-creational aims is attractive (Tuli et al., 2007) but value propositions are not explicitly discussed by these authors”.

The term value proposition has been conceptualised as, “*reciprocal promises of value, operating to and from suppliers and customers seeking an equitable exchange*” (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006, p. 334–335). This reciprocity represents an “*invitation to play*” whereby the supplier and customer propose and outline their views and expectations regarding co-creation activities and value-in-use (Eggert et al., 2018). In this sense, the solution value proposition can primarily be illustrated through customers’ and suppliers’ views about the problem-solving process, what activities and resources are required from both parties during the co-creation and the perceived value-in-use.

Although solutions marketing scholars rarely use the term solutions value proposition explicitly in their discourse (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2011), they tend to have a homogeneous view of the solution value proposition, characterising it as a complex offering that has a long sales cycle (e.g. Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007) and which involves intense and intricate value co-creation activities (e.g., Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Petri and Jacob, 2016). These attributes of the homogeneous solutions value proposition are presented in figure 2.6.

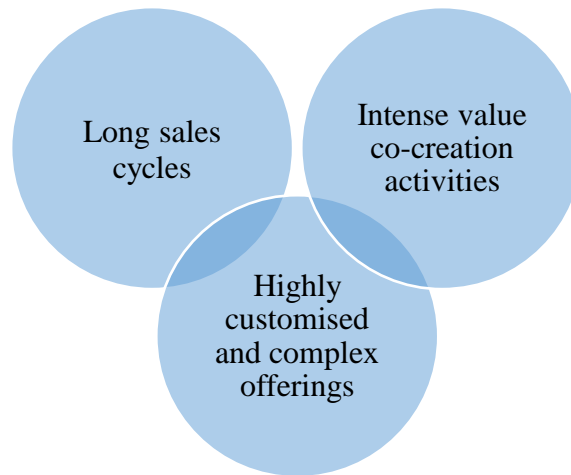


Figure 2.6: A homogenous solutions value proposition view (own figure)

However, prior research provides evidence that customers not only need highly customised and complex solutions but, rather, solution offerings that are most pertinent to their lives and needs (e.g., Brax and Jonsson, 2009; Payne and Frow, 2014). Therefore, in their recent conceptual work on the customer value proposition concept in business markets, Eggert and his colleagues (2018) argue that providers in business markets are required to offer multiple customer value propositions which address different types of customers who may have different concerns and priorities. Nevertheless, these scholars acknowledge that their proposition is theoretically grounded and needs further empirical investigation. Therefore, this study addresses this void by considering the multiple solution value proposition approach to highlight its influence on the co-creation activities and identify managerial implications. Therefore, the second research question becomes:

RQ2: *How does adopting a multiple solution value proposition approach influence value communication and the co-creation activity?*

Answering this question is important because it breaks free from the “*one size fits all solution*” approach dominated in the current customer solutions research (Windler et al., 2016). Moreover, it also helps managers to plan and organise their resources and processes effectively during the co-creation.

2.4.4.3 The impact of cultural issues on solutions value co-creation

The third opportunity to contribute to the solutions marketing literature stems from the predominant focus on western markets, ignoring the potential impact of other business cultures on the solution value co-creation process. The research designs for high customer readiness solutions markets have focused on the European Union, USA, and Scandinavian contexts. Giannakis, Doran, and Chen (2012) state that the majority of current supplier relationship management models are developed in the context of either western or Japanese business cultures without adequately addressing cross-cultural issues. Powers et al., (2016) have investigated solutions marketing in China without a delineation of the impact of cultural issues but they posit a need to investigate the impact of business culture on the value co-creation phases of customer solutions.

Indeed, a basic assumption pertinent to the theoretical foundation of the S-D logic of marketing, is that value co-creation activities are shaped by social forces and cultural dimensions (Edvardsson, Tronvoll and Gruber, 2011). Given that S-D logic defines the actors involved in the co-creation as resource integrators (Kleinaltenkamp et al., 2012; Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016), it becomes logical to assume that the behaviour of these actors is heavily dependent on their cultural backgrounds and orientations. In consequence, traditional norms, values and behaviours adopted by market actors may exert a profound influence on the service exchange and the value co-creation process (Chan et al., 2010; Edvardsson, Tronvoll and Gruber, 2011).

However, the subject of the influence of cultural issues on service exchange and value co-creation activities within business markets has been predominantly overlooked (Ostrom et al., 2015). According to Woodruff and Flint (2006), this negligence is unsurprising due to the constant focus on western markets:

“Perhaps the most important context concern could be culture. Much of the limited understanding that we have about customer value phenomena comes from research conducted in the United States, Western Europe, and Great Britain. We cannot say that these findings will hold up in other, very different cultures” (Woodruff and Flint, 2006, p192).

Therefore, this study employs an Arabian B2B solution context to determine whether and how Arabian business culture influences solution value co-creation activities. Indeed, the Arab world is of major significance to the west as it is an important economic region due to its natural resources, political influence, geographic location and market size, making it a lucrative investment opportunity to international firms (Abosag and Lee, 2013; Berger et al., 2015). Managerially, the findings should have practical implications for local and international suppliers aiming to provide customer solutions in such contexts. Hence, the third question becomes:

RQ3: How does an Arabian business culture impact the solutions value co-creation process?

2.4.4.4 Solutions value co-destruction

The fourth opportunity to contribute to extant solutions marketing research stems from the need for a better understanding of customer and provider practices that lead to negative co-creation experiences. Extant solutions marketing research concludes that the value co-creation phases of customer solutions are fraught with conflicts and challenges (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012) and role ambiguity (Sjödén, Parida and Wincent, 2016) that may destroy value co-creation experiences at any phase of the solutions marketing process. Such conflicts and challenges arise because solutions exchanges are highly surrounded by complex interactive processes. This complexity stems from the divergent views that solutions providers and customers have about the various aspects involved in solutions exchanges. For instance, customers having unrealistic expectations of what solutions can perform serves as a significant challenge in setting a smooth value co-creation process (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012).

While extant solutions marketing research has implicitly acknowledged that customer and providers involved the co-creation process can perceive negative outcomes, the knowledge about how customers and solutions providers experience unsuccessful and unpleasant value co-creation experiences remains scant. This is surprising as there is a consensus among value co-destruction scholars (e.g. Echeverri and Skålén, 2011; Prior and Marcos-Cuevas, 2016) that co-destruction coexists and happens simultaneously with co-creation activities (section 2.2.5). Value co-destruction thought addresses how parties' actions and behaviours might influence the wellbeing of another

party and negatively affect the value co-creation experience (e.g., Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010; Prior and Marcos-cuevas, 2016).

This study argues that it is essential to identify, analyse and manage customers' and providers' practices that lead to negative value co-creation experiences, as there is a consensus among solutions marketing scholars that ignoring them can disrupt achieving a smooth value co-creation process and may lead to solutions failure (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016). To do so, this study will draw on the theoretical lens of value co-destruction thought as it has been recognised as a fundamental basis to understand challenges and negative experiences involved in provider and customer exchanges (Ostrom, Parasuraman, Bowen, Patricio and Voss, 2015; Plé, 2017).

However, while extant solutions marketing research implicitly highlights that the occurrence of such negative value co-creation experiences when engaging in a joint resource integration process is highly likely (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012), the academic research in this area remains largely in a nascent phase (Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016; Sjödin, Parida and Wincent, 2016). Therefore, this study will integrate value co-destruction thought into the solutions value co-creation phases and, thus, the fourth research question becomes:

RQ4: What provider and customer practices lead to destroying value co-creation experiences in solution exchanges?

Investigating the co-destruction practices that are caused by customers and providers from a dyadic perspective becomes more important within the solutions context, given that value can be diminished by both relational partners, separately and jointly (Vafeas, Hughes and Hilton, 2016). Managerially, given the importance of creating effective resource integration processes between the customer and supplier to develop and implement successful solutions, understanding what causes value diminution throughout the solution co-creation process is important to avoid them in practice.

Overall, the need to address the four identified research questions in this study is in response to several calls for a better understanding of value co-creation trajectories within the customer solutions context in different markets and industries (e.g. Nordin and Kowalkowski, 2010; Evanschitzky et al., 2011; Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016; Powers et al., 2016; Kowalkowski et al., 2017; Aarikka-Stenroos and

Jaakkola, 2012; Ostrom et al., 2015; Eggert et al., 2018). The four devised research questions integrate various streams of value co-creation trajectories with the impact of business culture on the solutions exchange practice. These identified gaps will be the main focus of this study and can be presented in Figure 2.7.

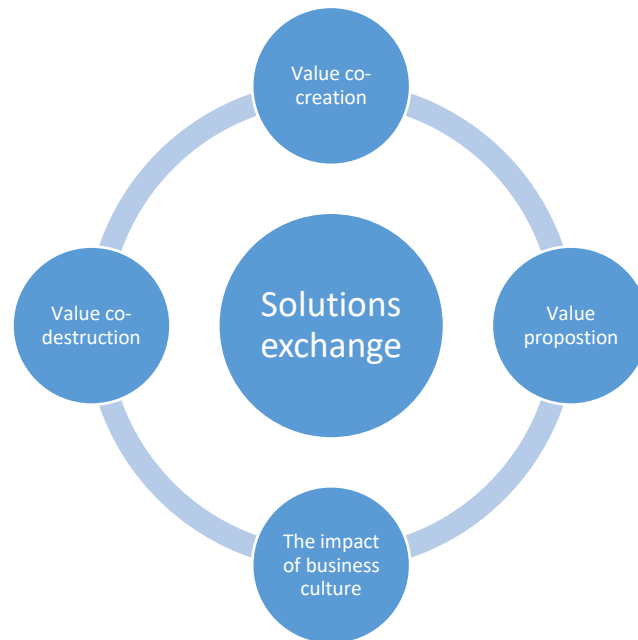


Figure 2.7: Areas that will be highlighted in this study

To answer the four research questions, this study will employ solutions offerings originated in the information and communication technology sector (ICT). In their seminal paper and critical review of solutions offerings, Nordin and Kowalkowski (2010) criticize the predominant focus on customer solutions studies in the context of complex manufacturing-based industries and call for further customer solutions studies in the context of service-based sectors:

“[...] the strongly product-centric paradigm still prevailing in many research communities, there has been a shortage of research on solutions originating in such service sectors as software and banking” (Nordin and Kowalkowski, 2010, p.445).

In response to this call, various solutions marketing scholars (e.g., Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Petri and Jacob, 2016) have begun to adopt solutions offerings originated in purely service-based sectors such as the context of KIBS in their research design as stated earlier in this chapter. These studies initially tend to combine various sectors within KIBS including IT services, R&D services, and legal, financial and

management consultancy (e.g., Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007) without distinguishing between several types of solutions that originate from various business sectors.

However, it has been argued that technology-based solutions originated in the ICT sector differ from other business fields such as legal and financial consultancy (Sharma, Iyer, and Evanschitzky, 2008). Given the fact that ICT solutions are considered high tech and encompassing technical innovation (Miles et al., 1995), customers' may not be experienced in such cutting-edge solutions. This leads to high information asymmetry among providers and their customers, causing various challenges to such customers such as assessing the market offering and selecting the right provider (Flowers, 2007). This means that business buyers who buy technology-based solutions in the ICT sector may not be able to identify their solutions' scope and objectives that prompt them to approach their solutions provider, as extant theory suggests (e.g., Petri and Jacob, 2016).

Therefore, this study focuses on customer solutions originated in technology-based solutions in the ICT sector including software and hardware and its associated services to identify the salient nuances embedded in solutions marketing in this sector. By doing so, the study follows the suggestion of distinguishing between solutions offerings originated in different kinds of service industries (Nordin and Kowalkowski, 2010, p454). Indeed, the ICT sector has been recognised for its relevance in integrating products and services, thus offering a wide range of customer solutions (Helander and Möller, 2008; Kauffman and Tsai, 2009). In addition, this sector provides an interesting context to understand the collaborative process embedded in value co-creation activities when developing and implementing technology-based solutions offerings (deLeon and Chatterjee, 2017).

Another reason prompting this study to focus on the ICT solutions sector is that its relevance to answer the fourth research question of this thesis concerns providers and customers practices that lead to negative co-creation experiences. Specifically, it has been reported that developing and implementing IT solutions is notoriously unpredictable and subject to frequent failure due to the complexity and ambiguity of these solutions:

“[...] over 40 percent of all IT projects experience cost and schedule overruns and another 25 percent are either cancelled before completion or deliver outputs that are never used” (Keil and Mähring, 2010, p.7).

Hence, by choosing this sector, it is hoped that this will enable the researcher to identify customers’ and providers’ practices that lead to experience suboptimal value when applying their resources and performing their roles.

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has reported on the literature review of customer solutions in the light of the conceptual framework proposed by S-D logic. The first section of the review introduced S-D logic as opposed to the G-D logic. It has shown that the service-centred view of exchange places more emphasis on operant resources such as knowledge and skills as the fundamental basis of exchange. Furthermore, S-D also posits that customers have become heavily involved in the value creation process through introducing the value co-creation thought as one of the most fundamental tenets of S-D logic. Consistent with S-D logic that, “*implies that the goal is to customize offerings*” (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, p.12), business firms in industrial markets are increasingly shifting from providing standalone goods and services to integrating them into solutions offerings. Hence, the second section reviewed the extant work on the customer solutions concept and how this concept embodies the service dominant logic framework.

The last section extensively reviewed the solutions marketing stream, highlighting the value co-creation phases embedded in offering customer solutions. Subsequently, four main research gaps were identified which then translated into research questions which this study aims to address. The first question is concerned with how LCRMs influence the role of the provider in the solution co-creation process. The second question attempts to gain better understanding of the importance of adopting a multiple solutions value proposition and its effect on the co-creation process. The third research question was formulated to identify any possible impact of an Arabian business culture on value co-creation phases within solution exchanges. Finally, the fourth research question aims at understanding value co-destruction thought and its applicability within solutions marketing. The following chapter highlights the role of the research context in this study and presents the Arab business culture, justifying the specific selection of Jordan for the research design of this study.

Chapter 3: Research Context

3.1 Introduction

Solutions marketing scholars stress the need to replicate their studies in different cultural contexts to investigate how unique business cultures may affect the collaborative process within solutions exchange. Unlike previous research, this study aims at investigating value co-creation trajectories within a non-western solution context. It proposes that extending solutions marketing research into other non-western contexts is important as this “*could validate, diversify, and enrich existing research with western origins*” (Kowalkowski, Gebauer and Oliva, 2017, p.85). Therefore, this chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the research context that will underpin this study. Specifically, it justifies why contexts matter when researching value co-creation activities.

The first section of this chapter highlights the role of the context for theorising and testing in social research. Subsequently, the second section discusses the concept of culture and delineates the Arab culture by drawing on the lens of previous cultural frameworks. The third section introduces the Arab business culture that underlines how business is carried out in the Arabian world. The last section of this chapter introduces Jordan for the research design and justifies the specific selection of this country.

3.2 Why research context is important?

According to Cappelli and Sherer (1991, p.65), the term context refers to “*the surroundings associated with phenomena which help to illuminate that phenomena, typically factors associated with units of analysis above those expressly under investigation*”. Contexts are of central importance because they contribute to developing and testing theories in social research. The role of the research context and its value for theorising has received significant attention in various business research streams including marketing (Arnould, Price and Moisio, 2006), strategic management (McKiernan, 2006), organisational behaviour (Johns, 2006), entrepreneurship (Zahra, 2007) and international business research (Poulis, Poulis and Plakoyiannaki, 2013).

Therefore, recognising the role of context among marketing scholars is essential because it enables them to better understand how variations manifest in different context situations. For example, it has been argued that behaviours and interactions performed by market actors (e.g., buyers and sellers) in a certain context are largely sensitive to the economy and culture that shape that context (Arnould, Price and Moisio, 2006). More importantly, context becomes an increasingly important element within the S-D framework as it may influence how actors involved in co-creation perceive the service exchange process (Chandler and Vargo, 2011). As argued by Edvardsson, Tronvoll and Gruber (2011) different actors may perceive the same service exchange process differently in different social contexts. This is because different social contexts imply different beliefs and values held by actors which in turn influence their perceptions and actions in the co-creation process.

Ostrom et al. (2015) note that most of the principles and theories generated on service exchanges and value co-creation activities originate from western contexts and, therefore, research should be extended to other contexts. Similarly, Mustak (2017) states that expanding the contextual diversity in terms of geographical locations and culture on value co-creation research enriches current western-based insights. All of these calls suggest that more attention should be directed to investigate how different economic and cultural factors may impact service exchange and value co-creation activities. Thus, it is important to broaden our understanding of value co-creation research in business markets beyond the western context (Powers, Sheng and Juan, 2016; Kowalkowski, Gebauer and Oliva, 2017). In this sense, the suggestion taken forward in this study is that extending solutions provision research into an Arab business context may shed light on the impact of Arabian business culture on the collaborative process embedded in the complex practice of customer solutions (Johns, 2006).

Traditionally, the definition of culture has always been open for debate among anthropologists and sociologists. Nevertheless, the literature suggests that culture includes shared values, norms, attitudes and practices that distinguish the behaviour of one group among others (Hofstede, 2001). These elements that make up culture give members of particular culture the script for a behaviour and reasoning behind it (Youngdahl et al., 2003). Therefore, culture markedly influences the way people interact, behave

and make use of their environment. Culture can be learned and shared and continues to grow and change (Soares, Farhangmehr and Shoham, 2007). Culture is also a complex construct that can be studied at the national and organisation levels (Hofstede, 1998) and the business relationships level (Hutchings and Weir, 2006; Berger et al., 2015).

As the third research question of this study seeks to identify the impact of business cultural issues on solutions value co-creation within an Arabian context, it is vital to briefly review the Arab culture from a broader perspective before introducing the Arabian business culture in the next section.

3.3 The Arab culture

The Arab world is defined as consisting of all Arab speaking states within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Khakhar and Gulzar, 2013). Social life in the Arab world is characterised by loyalty to extended family, respect for elderly people and high mutual interdependence among individuals. In her review of work on Arab culture and communication, Feghali (1997) concludes that values such as collectivism, hospitality and honour are the most prominent values that shape the life of Arabic people. This is due to historic way of living represented by the need to act together and help one another. Informal social-based networks and relationships are essential within the family, kinship and clan in the Arab culture. Today, this profound social network system in the Arabian world is prominent and affects social, political and economic life (Mohamed and Mohamad, 2011).

The historic roots of the Arab culture embodied in social networks and relationships has resulted in what has become known as “*wasta*” practice (El-Said and Harrigan, 2009). Although different definitions of *wasta* can be found in previous academic work on Arab culture (e.g., Hooker, 2009; Berger et al., 2015), this study adopts the definition proposed by Mohamed and Mohamad (2011) as the author of this thesis is Arabian and believes that their definition seems to literately delineate what it specifically means. Mohamed and Mohamad (2011, p.412) define the term *wasta* as, “*a form of favouritism that provides individuals with advantages not because of merit or right but because of who they know*”. In other words, *wasta* exemplifies a key person who has high social status and accepted rank that makes them influential among their group. It enables well-connected people to speed up administrative procedures and to

gain better access to business opportunities, government contracts, tax exemptions and credit (Berger et al., 2015).

In summary, Arab countries are collective societies and high context cultures that are driven by relationships, harmony and social networks (Hall, 1966; Hofstede, 2001). As the study's focus is on how Arabian business suppliers and customers interact in the collaborative process and co-create value with each other, the next section discusses previous work on Arabian B2B practices to synthesise Arabian business culture components and relate them to the notion of the value co-creation process.

3.4 Arabian Business culture

Recently, there has been a recurrent theme among international marketing scholars to utilise the term *business culture* in their discourse (Hutchings and Weir, 2006; Berger et al., 2015, 2017) to describe common business practices adopted by managers in different contexts. Those scholars primarily use the term business culture to shed light on the unique aspect of the business and management practices that differentiate western and eastern cultures (Hutchings and Weir, 2006). A business culture can simply be explained by the mechanisms and systems that shape the meetings, interactions, formalities, and negotiations that take place between the customer and supplier in a certain context. For instance, an Arabian supply chain manager might choose a certain supplier because the owner of this supplying firm is a close relative of the manager (Hutchings and Weir, 2006). In contrast, personal connections established between individuals in western markets are not used to govern the relationships between firms as readily in Arabian markets (Berger et al., 2015).

Although reviewing relationships marketing in the Arab world and cross cultural negotiations research reveals limited studies on how business is carried out in Arabian markets (e.g. Abosag and Lee, 2013; Khakhar and Gulzar, 2013; Berger et al., 2015), these scholars agree that Arabian countries have a distinct business culture that varies significantly from the business culture in western markets. While western business practices are primarily rule-based cultures where the behaviour is regulated by respect for rules, Arabian business practices is driven by relationships where social networks regulate the behaviour (Hooker, 2009; Berger et al., 2015). This suggests that such social networks embedded in the Arabian business culture may influence how the customer and supplier engage in co-creating customer solutions.

The value co-creation notion is often perceived as a dialogue between the buyer and supplier (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Payne, Storbacka and Frow, 2008) that entails a great amount of negotiation whereby both parties communicate with each other to integrate their resources and propose the best solution offering (Ballantyne et al., 2011; Eggert et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important to briefly review cross cultural research on business negotiations to provide a theoretical foundation on the uniqueness of Arabian business culture.

According to the theory of business negotiation (Ghauri, 2003; Brett and Gelfand, 2005), cultural factors such as use of time, personal relations and pattern of communications play a major role in how buyers and suppliers interact and view the negotiation process. The time factor refers to how parties involved in the negotiation process think about time and its importance. While time is perceived as a precious value in western business culture, it has less value in other business cultures such as in the Arab world (Ghauri, 2003). In their study of how Arab managers in Lebanon negotiate with their counterparts, Khakhar and Gulzar (2013) found that Arabian managers prefer to spend a lot of time in developing strong relationships before commencing a formal discussion of a business agreement. In contrast, getting the deal done precedes relationship development among suppliers and customers in the western business community (Hutchings and Weir, 2006).

With regard to personal relations in the negotiation process, it has been argued that business negotiators in western culture are more concerned with what is being exchanged irrespective of who is representing these firms (Ghauri, 2003). However, accumulating research indicates that Arab business models value relationships and people more than what is exchanged (Rice, 1999; Berger et al., 2015). This tendency of Arabian business culture towards developing social relationships has been shown to influence the buyer's decision on choosing their suppliers. The literature has provided evidence that the supplier that wins the deal in Arabian markets may not necessarily be the one that provides the best solution performance (value-in-use) as suggested in western contexts (e.g., Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011; Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016) but rather the one with the strongest *wasta* connections (Hutchings and Weir, 2006). Moreover, ALHussan, AL-Husan and Alhesan (2017) have found that the involvement of senior managers of suppliers' firms when dealing with key Arabian customers is obligatory rather than a strategic option as in

western practices. This is because such involvement makes customers feel they are being treated with absolute importance.

Another cultural aspect that may influence the way business is carried out in different business cultures is the pattern of communication. Zaharna (1995) has examined the pattern of communications among American and Arabs' public relations practitioners. Her study reports that the American culture shows a preference for a clear, accurate and direct communication style while Arabs manifest an indirect, ambiguous and implicit style. This means that in their communications, Arabs may conceal desired wants, needs, or goals during discourse (Feghali, 1997). However, according to the value co-creation notion, the Arabian style of communication embedded in the possibility of sharing ambiguous information appears to be problematic, given that the theory posits that sharing critical and accurate information between parties is essential in order to achieve effective dialogic communication (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012).

To sum up, all the above assumptions deduced from previous cross-cultural research suggest that Arabian business culture is different than the western culture where most of the current solutions value co-creation activities were carried out. Hence, it could be argued that these assumptions may affect the type and quality of resources developed and shared among Arabian managers during the co-creation process. Therefore, choosing an Arab context in this study should provide an interesting context to understand how Arabian business culture may affect the customer solutions process. Having illustrated the rationale behind choosing the Arab context to conduct this study, the next subsection presents the specific selection of Jordan to answer the research questions.

3.5 Jordan

Jordan is a small country in the Middle East and shares borders with Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria and Palestine. The country is geographically located at the crossroads of three continents, Asia, Africa and Europe. Jordan's area is 89,342 sq km of which 88,802 sq km is land and 540 sq km water. The country's population is estimated to be 10.248 million (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019). Politically, Jordan is considered a stable country compared with the current unstable political environment in other Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq and Syria. Economically, Jordan lacks natural

resources including oil and water and its trade routes have recently been disrupted because of political instability in Iraq and Syria (Abuznaid and Weir, 2011). Nevertheless, Jordan has strong industrial links with several countries and unions which support its economies such as the European Union (EU) and the United States of America (USA). Jordan's economy is dominated by the service sector which shapes the workforce, of which 78% works in the services sector (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019).

Overall, Jordan, as a less developed market and non-western context, was selected for three main reasons. First, Jordan is a developing and low to middle-income country (Al-Jaghoub, S. and Westrup, 2003). In such countries, it can be argued that business customers may not have strong financial capabilities and, therefore, this may influence the nature of solutions offered. In addition, it has been argued that in low-income markets, such as Jordan, customers are more likely to emphasise short-term transactions such as price (value-in-exchange), to the extent that such short-term focus limits their abilities to evaluate the value obtained from solutions over the longer term (value-in-use) (Anderson and Wynstra, 2010; Kowalkowski, 2011). In consequence, the Jordanian context serves as an interesting context to investigate how solutions providers cope with such a challenge, given that extant solutions marketing theory suggests that business buyers should emphasise the value derived from the use of an offering (value-in-use) when engaging in a customer solution relationship (Macdonald, Kleinalkenkamp and Wilson, 2016).

Second, the previous chapter identified that there is a lack of research in solutions originated in the ICT sector. The ICT sector in Jordan is one of the most developed and robust in the region (Oxford Business Group, 2015). This position was achieved when the Jordanian king and government took the initiative to develop the competitive advantage of this sector regionally and globally (Al-Jaghoub, S. and Westrup, 2003). The Jordanian ICT sector has been characterised by offering high-value activities such as computer programming, data processing and hosting (The World Bank, 2013). This makes Jordan suitable for understanding solutions marketing activities, especially in the information technology and telecom industries.

Third, pragmatically, ease of access to Jordanian ICT suppliers and customer firms as the researcher is from Jordan and has worked in this sector for five years. This makes

the researcher familiar with the nature of organisations that will be targeted for this study, thereby making the interviews more effective (Myers and Newman, 2007). Having justified choosing Jordan for the research design of this study, the next section summarises this chapter.

3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the concept of the research context in management and marketing research and established the role of context in developing and testing theories in the business research field. Next, this chapter discussed the concept of culture and specifically introduced the hallmarks of Arab culture. Subsequently, the notion of business culture was introduced and what constitutes an Arabian business culture was highlighted. Finally, this chapter concluded by providing some information about Jordan and why this country was particularly chosen for the purpose of this research. Figure 3.1 shows the research context that will be utilised in the empirical work to answer the research questions of this study. Having introduced the contextual background of this study, the next chapter presents the research methodology.

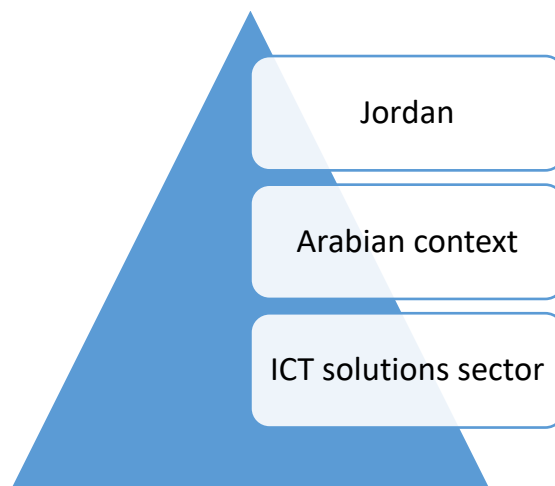


Figure 3.1: Study research context

Chapter 4: Research Philosophy and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research philosophy and methodology adopted to answer the research questions of the study. First, the research aim and research questions are revisited. The second section discusses the philosophical position which will guide this study in conducting the empirical investigation. The third section addresses the research approaches and highlights where this study positions itself between these approaches. The fourth section outlines the research strategies. Subsequently, the fifth section addresses the research design and research methods. Finally, this chapter discusses the ethical research issues which must be considered in conducting this research.

4.2 Research aim and questions

Using Jordan as a research context, the aim of this study is to develop a better understanding of value co-creation trajectories within B2B customer solutions in LCRMs. Four distinct but interrelated research gaps were highlighted based on the literature review (chapter 2). These gaps were then translated into four research questions which this study addresses. The research questions are:

RQ1: What influence, if any, does low customer readiness in solutions markets have on the role of the provider in the solutions value co-creation process?

RQ2: How does adopting a multiple solution value propositions approach influence value communication and the co-creation activity?

RQ3: How does an Arabian business culture impact the solutions value co-creation process?

RQ4: What provider and customer practices lead to destroying value co-creation experiences in solution exchanges?

The following sections present and compare different philosophical and methodological decisions available to social researchers. Meanwhile, justification of selecting a certain approach and strategy is explained.

4.3 Philosophical issues

Within management and business research, various philosophical perspectives and assumptions about the world and the nature of knowledge can be adopted by researchers when conducting social research. These assumptions are referred to as paradigms which underpin a researcher's view of knowledge creation (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Collis and Hussey (2009, p.55) define a research paradigm as, "*a philosophical framework that guides how scientific research should be conducted*".

Philosophical assumptions in social research are largely concerned with matters of ontology, epistemology and methodology. Understanding these issues is essential because such issues would significantly influence a researcher's decision on choosing appropriate methods to answer research questions (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Hence, researchers will be better informed of which designs will work and which will not. Ontology is concerned with researchers' beliefs about the nature of being and reality. Epistemology, however, relates to the nature of knowledge and determining the kind of knowledge that can be considered adequate and legitimate (Crotty, 1998; Bryman, 2015). Methodology is the process and techniques adopted by researchers to acquire knowledge about reality (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) see Table 4.1, below.

Table 4.1: *Ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods and techniques*

Ontology	Philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality
Epistemology	A general set of assumptions about ways of inquiring into the nature of the world
Methodology	A combination of techniques used to inquire into a specific situation
Methods and Techniques	Individual techniques for data collection, analysis, etc.

Source: Easterby-Smith et al. (2012, p.18)

The central debate among philosophers concerns ontological and epistemological paradigms. Researchers generally draw on different ontological and epistemological assumptions when conducting their research. The choice between epistemological and

ontological decisions is interdependent and guides the choice of methodology that follows. Hence, the concepts of ontology and epistemology are discussed in the following subsections.

4.3.1 Ontological considerations

Ontology involves beliefs about reality and reflects a researcher's view about how the world works (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). It is important to consider the ontological perspectives in research as they provide a lens of how the research is conducted and questions are formulated (Tronvoll et al., 2011; Bryman, 2015). Broadly, there are two fundamental aspects of ontology, known as objectivism and subjectivism. Objectivism typically portrays that social entities exist in reality external to and independent of social actors (Crotty, 1998; Bryman, 2015). Objectivism portrays that researchers are detached from the phenomena which are being studied. In contrast, the subjectivism (or the constructionist) perspective views reality as something created from the perceptions and interactions of social actors (Saunders et al., 2012). Rather than focusing on gathering facts and measuring how often they occur as an objectivist stance portrays, a subjectivist researcher focuses on what people individually and collectively perceive about a certain phenomenon (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Hence, a subjectivist assumes that reality is shaped by our perceptions, experience and interpretations. It is important, here, to mention that subjectivism is consistent with the term social constructionism which views reality as being socially constructed (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012).

In consideration of ontological perspectives, this research adopts the constructionist assumption that the social world and external reality are created by human perception and experience. This is consistent with the overall aim of this research that concerns value co-creation activities embedded in suppliers and customers' collaborative processes in the Jordanian solution market. Indeed, adopting the constructionist stance has been recognised as a useful position to uncover how buyers and suppliers perceive their roles and experiences when engaging in the value co-creation process within a solutions marketing context (Kohtamäki and Rajala, 2016). Having identified the ontological position for this study, the next section discusses the second philosophical position, known as epistemology.

4.3.2 *Epistemological considerations*

While the ontological research paradigm is concerned with the nature of the reality, an epistemological research paradigm concerns with the way in which we obtain a valid and legitimate knowledge in a field of study (Crotty, 1998; Bryman, 2015). Generally, there are two contrasting views regarding what constitutes acceptable knowledge and how this knowledge can be obtained. The first view concerns a positivism perspective which is based on objectivist ontology. Positivism primarily posits that social science must be studied objectively in the same manner as natural sciences. Therefore, this approach aims at generating facts, and these facts serve as a basis to provide laws (Crotty, 1998). Consequently, this view emphasises a highly structured research method in order to facilitate replication (Saunders et al., 2012, De Beuckelaer and Wagner, 2007). Research that adopts the positivistic view entails formulating and testing hypotheses, and operationalising concepts by which they can be measured (Bryman, 2015). Thus, a positivism assumption is often associated with quantitative observations and statistical analysis. Furthermore, meanings and facts discovered by positivist researchers are assumed to be independent of researchers' feelings and opinions. However, social science research has been characterised by studying intricate rather than static objects as is the case in physical science. Hence, it is plausible to say that following rigid techniques rooted in the positivistic approach may not be appropriate to investigate complex phenomena in business and management research.

The second view, however, concerns interpretivism epistemology which is rooted in the constructionist ontology. Interpretive research has evolved as a response to the dominance of positivism in the 19th and 20th centuries (Morgan and Smircich, 1980). The interpretive paradigm has been termed variously in literature as phenomenology, social constructionism, interpretive sociology, new paradigm enquiry and qualitative methodology (Milliken, 2001). The notion of interpretive research advocates that social sciences such as business management research require a different logic than views adopted in studying issues inherent in natural sciences (Bryman, 2015). Rather than viewing reality as an objective truth waiting for us to discover it, as embedded in positivism, an interpretive paradigm portrays that truth or meaning is derived from our

engagement with the realities in the world (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, facts and meanings generated by interpretive research are largely contingent on the researcher's beliefs and interpretations (Myers, 2009). Generally speaking, interpretive research is often associated with qualitative research whereby researchers make sense of people's perceptions and experiences in relation to a certain phenomenon. Table 4.2 summarises the key features and implications of positivist and interpretive paradigms.

Table 4.2: *Contrasting implications of positivism and interpretive paradigms*

	Positivism	Social Constructionism (Interpretivism)
The observer	must be independent	is part of what is being observed
Human interests	should be irrelevant	are the main drivers of science
Explanations	must demonstrate causality	aim to increase general understanding of the situation
Research progresses through	hypotheses and deductions	gathering rich data from which ideas are induced
Concepts	need to be defined so that they can be measured	should incorporate stakeholder perspectives
Units of analysis	should be reduced to simple terms	may include the complexity of 'whole' situations
Generalisation through	statistical probability	theoretical abstraction
Sampling requires	large numbers selected randomly	small number of cases chosen for specific reasons

Source: Easterby-Smith et al. (2012, p24)

4.3.3 *Epistemological stance adopted in this study: Inteprevistisim*

The previous sections have discussed research philosophy and major ontological and epistemological assumptions have been highlighted. It is essential to choose the most appropriate research paradigm for this research as it helps in understanding the phenomenon in question and informs the research design. In consideration of the epistemological assumptions outlined earlier, this research adopts an interpretive approach. Although the positivistic paradigm has been historically the most frequently used within marketing and service research, this paradigm, however, tends to view the marketing phenomenon as a static pattern rather than a concept that entails dynamic activities (Tronvoll et al., 2011). Value co-creation proposes that customers are no longer

perceived as passive actors in service exchanges but, rather, active players who co-create value with their service providers. In this sense, adopting a positivist stand that focuses on measurable constructs may limit our understanding of how customers and providers engage and co-create value within business markets (Edvardsson, Tronvoll and Gruber, 2011). Therefore, it can be argued that such a paradigm is not appropriate when understanding a complex and dynamic phenomenon such as the resource integration process embedded in co-creation activities. In contrast, it has been argued that adopting an interpretive paradigm is essential to capture more complex insights and meanings embedded in co-creation activities and interactions (Järvensivu and Törnroos, 2010; Tronvoll et al., 2011).

Specifically, the second chapter highlighted that value co-creation activities embedded in the collaborative process within customer solutions have been conceptualised as a complex and dynamic process. This complexity stems from the fact that providers and customers are expected to draw on various resources and perform various roles throughout the co-creation phases. In addition, customers and suppliers may have divergent views regarding value orientations and the best value-in-use, making this process highly complex (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). This study seeks to understand how providers and customers interact with each other within a customer solution context.

The interpretive approach is also appropriate because it recognises the role of context in understanding social behaviour and reality. Interpretivists believe that people should not be studied out of context or reduced to variables but, rather, according to the contexts that shape their perceptions and realities (Hudson and Ozanne, 2002). The third chapter of this thesis highlighted the importance of the research context exemplified by Arabian business markets and discussed how Arabian business relationships are distinct from other business cultures. Therefore, this research adopts an interpretive paradigm and views the customer solution process as a social construction that necessitates the intervention of the researcher to obtain greater understanding of this process. Figure 4.1 demonstrates the rationale for adopting the interpretive paradigm for obtaining understanding of value co-creation trajectories within customer solutions in an Arabian market.

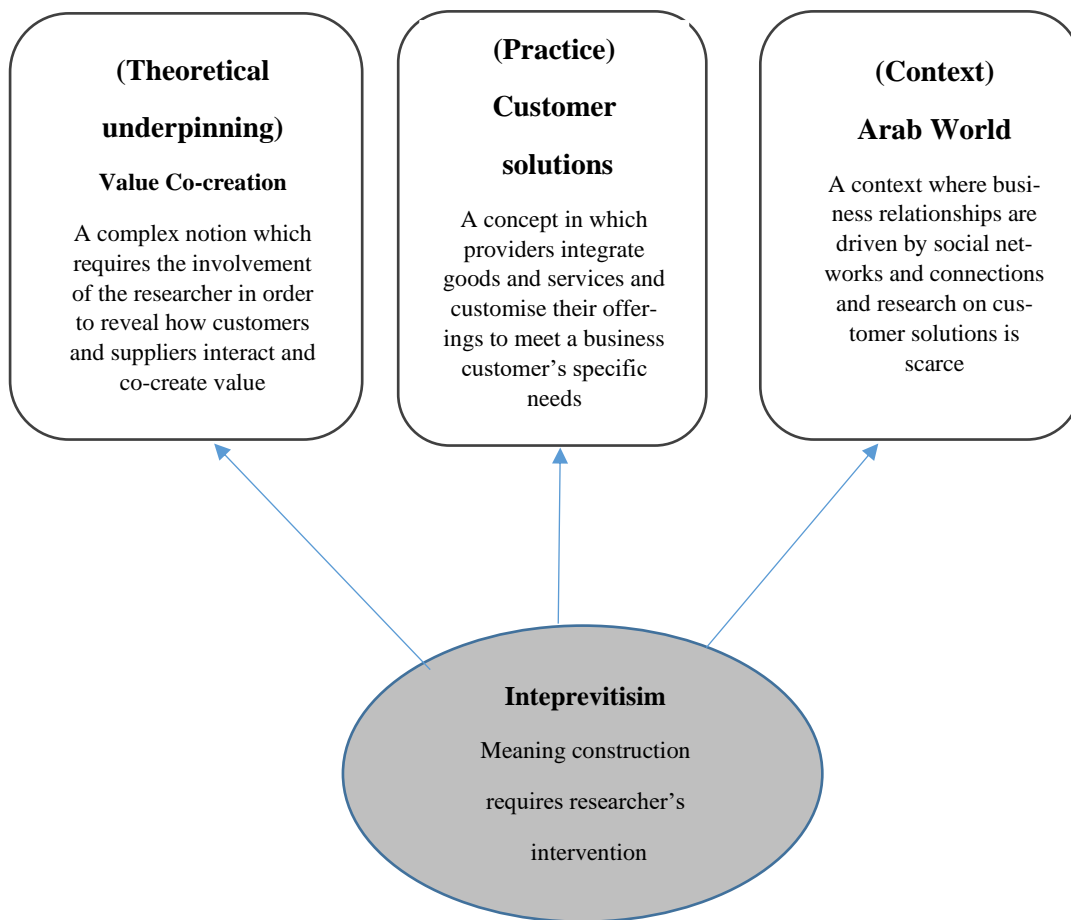


Figure 4.1: Relevance of the interpretive approach to this study

Having justified the philosophical stance of this thesis, the following section discusses the research approaches with regard to the theoretical stances and identifies the theoretical position accordingly.

4.4 Research approaches

Research approaches are explained by the extent to which researchers are clear about the theories which they draw on in their research. Generally, three research approaches have been identified; deduction, induction and abduction respectively (Saunders et al., 2012). Understanding these approaches is important as it informs researchers' decisions about research design. These three research reasoning approaches are discussed next.

4.4.1 Deduction versus Induction reasoning

Deductive reasoning resembles the scientific approach and methods followed in the positivist paradigm (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). Researchers who adopt deductive reasoning draw on a certain theory in order to deduce hypotheses that require empirical scrutiny. Hence, theories in this approach guide the observations, surveys and experiments while testing them (De Vaus, 2001). This reasoning is often utilised when researchers aim to explain causal relationships between different variables and concepts, and it is often carried out using quantitative research designs. A key characteristic of deductive reasoning is generalisation where researchers select a sufficiently large sample to achieve this goal.

In contrast, inductive reasoning moves from specific to general and aims at developing theories based on understanding the data collected in a specific context (De Vaus 2001; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). This approach helps researchers to delve far beyond the cause-effect relationships among investigated variables to understand what is going on in a certain social phenomenon. Gummesson (2003, p.488) states “*inductive research lets reality tell its story on its own terms and not on the terms of received theory and accepted concepts*”. In addition, inductive reasoning involves using less structured methods to produce substantial explanations for important issues in a field of study in a particular context (Bryman, 2015). Thus, studying a small sample may be more appropriate than a large sample as in the deductive approach which aims at generalisation. Researchers in this approach are more likely to work with qualitative data to identify patterns, themes and conceptual frameworks (De Vaus, 2001; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012).

4.4.2 Abduction approach

Despite the popularity of deductive and inductive reasoning as the main two opposite research reasoning approaches, they have been criticised as being inadequate when seeking to suggest new theories (Robson, 2002). Rather than moving from theory to fieldwork (deduction) or fieldwork to theory (induction), an abductive approach combines these approaches together (Suddaby, 2006). It views theory development as an ongoing process by moving back and forth within the literature, data and theories. The aim of this approach is suggesting new theories or understanding a new phenomenon

(Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Kovács and Spens, 2005). For instance, Töytäri and Rajala (2015) have explored the value-based selling phenomenon using the abductive approach. More specifically, this approach has been clearly adopted in the context of customer solutions to explore new aspects of this phenomenon, including the roles performed and resources contributed to by suppliers and customers within solutions marketing (e.g. Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012) and to develop solutions business model frameworks (e.g. Storbacka, 2011).

4.4.3 Selected approach: Inductive reasoning

As the prime aim of this study is to develop a better understanding of value co-creation activities within B2B customer solutions in a less mature solution market perspective, *deduction* is seen as inappropriate reasoning due to the highly structured approach followed, which may reduce the researcher's ability to understand how providers and customers interact and co-create value within the complex practice of customer solutions. Moreover, deduction reasoning is discarded because this study does not aim to scientifically explain causal relationships among certain variables or test hypotheses.

Meanwhile, *induction* and *abduction* are seen as appropriate for theory building. An abductive reasoning has been recently utilised in the industrial marketing discourse to develop theories and understand new phenomena. Despite the importance of the abductive approach in exploring new phenomena and developing new theories (see section 4.4.2), this research excludes the abductive reasoning approach as this thesis does not aim to explore a new phenomenon but, rather, an existing one, that is, the value co-creation process of customer solutions.

The second chapter concluded that more theoretical and critical investigations are needed to develop solutions marketing knowledge in various aspects (see section 2.4.4). Specifically, this study draws on the current customer solutions framework to gain a greater understanding of its applicability when applied in a less mature solutions market. By doing so, this study aims at developing solutions marketing knowledge in a specific context by investigating the role of providers in supporting the customer value creation process in LCRMs. Moreover, this study intends to develop our current solutions marketing knowledge through determining the impact of cultural issues on the customer solution process through employing an Arabian context. Therefore, the

inductive approach is seen as the best approach to be adopted in this study for its suitability in developing theories in specific contexts (Saunders et al., 2012). The specific selection of the induction approach resonates with the previous call made by Deighton and Narayandas (2004) to utilise this approach in exploring the value co-creation concept and its applicability in various contexts “*we do assert that the answer lies in the inductive development of theory from phenomena closely observed and thickly described*” (Deighton and Narayandas, 2004, p. 420). Indeed, the inductive approach has been widely used in solutions marketing literature seeking to develop solutions marketing theory (e.g. Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011; Sjödin, Parida and Wincent, 2016; Windler et al., 2016). Overall, the inductive approach is consistent with the interpretive paradigm which this study adheres to (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). Having justified the theoretical stance of this study, the following section will discuss the research design. The interpretive position will be defended throughout the discussion.

4.5 Research design: Qualitative research

A research design is the overall plan of data collection and analysis process which aims at answering the research questions. As stated by De Vaus (2001, p9) the function of a research design is “*to ensure that the evidence obtained enables us to answer the initial question as unambiguously as possible*”. Hence, the research design serves as a road map which guides the whole research project (Myers, 2009). Generally, there are two commonly used research methods in research design, quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods focus on the researchers’ interpretations of the numbers analysed, and it is associated with the positivist research philosophy outlined earlier in this chapter. These methods were originally developed in the natural sciences to address a certain natural phenomenon.

Qualitative methods, however, were found in social sciences to help researchers to get at the inner experience of participants and to determine how meanings were perceived by them (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Qualitative researchers believe that it is impossible to understand a certain phenomenon without talking to people. In other words, qualitative research focuses on discovery in a field of study rather than testing and measuring variables. However, the choice between the qualitative and quantitative

methods depends on the research question and its objectives. Quantitative methods are seen to be inappropriate in understanding respondents' perceptions and capturing people's full lived experiences (Gummesson, 2003; Polkinghorne, 2005; De Beuckelaer and Wagner, 2007). Specifically, in business markets settings, it has been argued that asking participants to "*fill in surveys restricts their ability to both provide personal input and make meaning of their experiences*" (Granot, Brashear and Cesar Motta, 2012, p.549). Therefore, quantitative methods are to be excluded in this study as it aims at gaining a better understanding of the value co-creation activities perceived and experienced among solutions providers and their customers in the Jordanian market. Therefore, this research adopts the qualitative research methods as data collection and analysis techniques. Qualitative techniques have been widely recognised to be appropriate in exploratory studies and understanding a phenomenon within its context (Morgan and Smircich, 1980; Polkinghorne, 2005; Myers, 2009).

Qualitative research has been considerably utilised in clarifying and explaining marketing activities in the context of B2C and B2B marketing (Carson et al., 2001). For instance, qualitative methods have been significantly utilised in predicting future patterns of behaviour of buyers in the consumer behaviour field (Milliken, 2001). Likewise, in industrial marketing discourse where complexity is prevalent in business networks and relationships, qualitative methods are largely used to provide in-depth understanding to investigate such relationships (Gummesson, 2003; Wagner, Lukassen and Mahlendorf, 2010; Kohtamäki and Rajala, 2016). Specifically, qualitative methods have been extensively utilised in solutions marketing literature to understand value co-creation activities and processes (e.g., Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011). Having justified the rationality of adopting qualitative methods for this study, the next section will present the major methodological inquiries utilised in qualitative research.

4.6 Methodological Approach: Purposeful Sampling Inquiry

There are a number of methodologies associated with the interpretive paradigm which researchers can employ to fulfil their research aim and objectives. Choosing a certain methodological approach primarily depends on the research question and nature of the phenomenon being studied. Given that the primary purpose of this study is concerned with developing a better understanding of the collaborative process embedded in co-

creation activities within a solution context, it is important to select people who are engaged in different activities associated with solutions co-creation activities.

Therefore, this study employs a purposeful sampling approach (Patton, 1990) to recruit managers of provider and customer firms who can offer rich information in relation to the purpose of this study. This approach allows for flexibility during the research process (Coyne, 1997). For instance, the second chapter highlighted that different members of the buying centre of customer firms are involved during solutions value co-creation (see section 2.4.3). Hence, adopting a purposeful sampling approach will allow the researcher to recruit managers from supplier and customer firms who are involved in different phases during the co-creation. By doing so, this study follows previous research (e.g., Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Petri and Jacob, 2016) that applied this approach within solutions co-creation research. Table 4.3 presents the major methodological approaches and justifies the use of purposeful sampling qualitative inquiry to fulfil the aim of this study.

Table 4.3: *Description of major interpretivist methodologies and their relevance to this study*

Methodology	Definition and/or Description	Relevant for this study?
Ethnography	A methodology derived from anthropology in which the researchers immerse themselves into the natural settings of their research subjects to gain a comprehensive insight into human behaviour.	No. This methodology is considered to be irrelevant because it would be challenging to gain access to observe direct meetings between the customer and supplier at different points of the solution value co-creation phases. Also, this requires investing a lot of time given that the co-creation process takes a long period of time. However, due to the limited time available for the researcher, the opportunity to act as an active part of the firm for a certain point of time is unrealistic.
Action Research	A methodology where researchers attempt to bring about change and monitor its results in a setting (i.e. organisation). The researcher becomes an active part of the research process and aims at assisting an organisation with the implementation of a change.	No. This methodology is discarded because this study does not aim at creating a certain change and implementing it.
Grounded Theory	A methodology in which a systematic set of procedures is used to develop	No. This methodology is seen irrelevant for this study as the four research questions of this study emanated from reviewing previous literature with a

	inductively-derived theory about phenomena. The main attributes of this approach are that data generates theory and data collection and analysis occur simultaneously.	particular theoretical lens in mind. Therefore, in contrast to grounded theory which does not depend on priori theory prior to data collection, this study draws on the co-creation notion to extend solutions marketing research in LCRM.
Case Studies	A methodology that is used to explore a single phenomenon (the case) in a natural setting using a variety of methods to obtain in depth knowledge. The case can be a particular business, group of workers, process, person, event or other phenomenon. Case study approach can be applied on one single case or multiple cases when researchers need to compare and contrast findings from different cases.	<p>No. Although the case study can be useful in investigating customer solution topics, this approach is seen as unsuitable for two reasons. First, while the case study methodology is a particularly useful approach when the researcher focuses on a single phenomenon, this study focuses on three interrelated but constantly treated as fragmented areas (i.e., co-creation, co-destruction, customer solution value proposition) that concern solutions marketing research. Hence, in order to understand these issues, the researcher needs to access to a large number of relevant supplier and customer firms to answer the four research questions. Hence, relying on case study methodology may limit the researcher's ability to achieve the research aim and answer the research questions of this study.</p> <p>Second, this study does not use a variety of methods to collect data as per the requirement of the case study approach but, rather, utilises only a qualitative interviewing process.</p>
Purposeful Sampling	A theme of qualitative inquiry where researchers recruit certain people or managers because they are information-rich. These people are seen as illuminative through offering a useful manifestation of the phenomenon of interest.	Yes. Given that this study investigates the collaborative process embedded in B2B customer solution exchange, a phenomenon that is not sufficiently analysed in extant solutions marketing research, the purposeful sampling approach is considered to be more suitable and realistic to recruit experienced managers from customer and provider firms to answer the four research questions. This approach is consistent with previous studies that aimed at examining the collaborative process embedded in solution value co-creation research.

Source: (Adapted from: Patton, 1990; Collis and Hussey, 2009; Bryman, 2015)

Having identified the most suitable methodological approach for this study, the next section discusses qualitative interview strategy as the main method utilised for data collection.

4.7 Interviewing strategy: Semi-structured

Interviews have been widely recognised as the most important data collection technique for qualitative researchers (Carson et al., 2001; Bryman, 2015). Qualitative interviewing is a way of discovering how others feel and think about their world (Rubin and Rubin,

1995). Generally, interviews could be conducted either face-to-face with one person or as a focus group where the researcher interviews participants in a group (Creswell, 2013). In addition to face-to-face interviews, other technological appliances and applications such as telephone and Skype can be used to conduct interviews. The role of the interviewer is to listen, prompt, encourage and direct interviewees to reveal their life experiences of a topic of interest (Myers, 2009). Thus, interviews help researchers to gather rich data and deeper meanings from the interviewed participants. It has been well established that interviews help researchers to refine their ideas about their research objectives and questions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012).

Broadly, interviews can be classified into three main types: structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Myers, 2009). First, structured interviews are primarily demonstrated when a researcher uses pre-formulated questions which are usually asked in a specific order and in a certain time. Therefore, the researcher is highly likely to be confined by pre-developed interview questions during the interview process. While this type of interview appears to be useful in ensuring the consistency of the interview process, it lacks flexibility and does not allow researchers to discover new aspects of the topic that participants may raise (Myers, 2009). Therefore, structured interviews are seen to be inappropriate for this study due to their rigidity.

Secondly, researchers might adopt unstructured interviews in which they tend to ask unplanned questions. Although this type of interview enables respondents to speak freely during the interview, researchers using this kind of interview may become overwhelmed by the amount of data they gather. In addition, unstructured interviews may provide irrelevant insights to the investigated phenomenon as it lacks focus in relation to the topic of interest (Bryman, 2015). As unstructured interviews also contradict the purpose of this study, which aims to answer specific research questions rather than exploring an open research topic, this type of interviews will also be disregarded. Thirdly, semi-structured interviews position between structured and unstructured interviews. While this kind of interview starts with pre-formulated questions, it allows researchers to modify and adopt new, emerging, questions based on the flow of the interview (Creswell, 2013). In this sense, semi-structured interviews are high likely to provide new, useful insights during the conversation among interviewees and interviewer (Myers and Newman, 2007).

Predominantly, semi-structured interviews have been widely utilised in industrial and B2B marketing research (e.g., Kindström and Kowalkowski, 2009; Keränen and Jalkala, 2013). Specifically, in solutions marketing, the consensus among solutions scholars that this area is an extremely fertile area for academic researchers as indicated in the second chapter, has urged researchers to draw on extensive qualitative research through conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews to develop theoretical frameworks that underline the solutions marketing subject. The purpose of this in-depth interviewing is to understand the experience of others and the meaning they make of that experience (Granot, Brashear and Cesar Motta, 2012). In other words, the primary purpose of in-depth interviewing in the solutions marketing context is to reveal the dynamic aspects of value co-creation activities among solutions providers and their customers.

Therefore, semi-structured interviews will be adopted for this study to gain a better understanding of solutions marketing and value co-creation activities in low customer readiness markets. Adopting this kind of interview is crucial in this study and helps the researcher to refine the research questions in order to elicit participants' views and opinions (Creswell, 2013). Having described the data collection method that will be utilised in this study, the next subsection illustrates the data collection process.

4.8 Data Collection Process

4.8.1 Pilot study

The data collection process of this study began by conducting a pilot study to generate broad ideas and themes that shape offering customer solutions in the Jordanian market. Kim (2011, p.191) defines the pilot study as a, “*feasibility study that comprises small scale versions of the planned study, trial runs of the planned methods, or miniature versions of the anticipated pilot in order to answer a methodological question (s) and to guide the development of the research plan*”. While a pilot study may not be intended to produce results (Holloway, 1997), it enables researchers to test interview protocols, thereby allowing them to refine the research questions during the interviewing process. It is also a helpful technique for inexperienced researchers who need to undertake a research project.

Most importantly, pilot interviewing is increasingly essential in cross-cultural research to establish data equivalence. Data equivalence was defined as the extent to which elements of a research design have the same meaning when applied into different cultural contexts (Hult et al., 2008). In this study, data equivalence was achieved by ensuring that construct equivalence (i.e., customer solution practice and the collaborative process as defined in existing research) was perceived similarly by Jordanian customers and suppliers to enhance the reliability and validity of findings. Hence, the pilot study in this thesis intended, first, to establish the suitability of the Jordanian context to reduce any bias that may emerge later in empirical results and theoretical inferences (Hult et al., 2008).

Therefore, an initial and short interview guide (Bryman, 2015) was developed to conduct a pilot study to understand the solutions marketing subject in a less mature market, exemplified by Jordan. The pilot interviewing guide entailed the title of the proposed research topic and the questions to be asked of the supplier firms. The primary aim of the initial interview guide was developed to gain an understanding of how solutions offerings are understood, communicated and marketed in Jordan. In essence, the pilot interview guide did not involve specific interview questions but, rather, broad questions (Eisenhardt, 1989) to learn how solutions providers understand the customer solution concept and their views on solutions marketing activities in that particular market. These questions were adapted from previous work on solutions marketing (e.g., Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). The interview guide was first written in English and then translated into Arabic by the researcher as this language is his mother tongue. The rationale behind this is to allow participants to freely express their experiences and views about specific issues that concern the Jordanian market (Granot, Brashear and Cesar Motta, 2012).

4.8.2 Access and sample selection

Securing co-operation from participants is essential when planning for research field work (Carson et al., 2001). Furthermore, having good knowledge about the characteristics of the organisational, situational and cultural context is essential to facilitate gaining access to research participants (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012; Bryman, 2015). A two-months (July and August 2016) timeframe was set to visit Jordan to

collect data in order to answer the research questions. To do so, the researcher first sent a letter via email to three leading companies operating within the Jordanian ICT sector, two months before travelling. The researcher introduced himself to these firms and the nature of the research topic, asking them whether they would be interested to take part in this research and, thus, obtain their approval to gain access to relevant managers involved in the solutions business.

However, none of these companies responded to the initial email. This was expected as the researcher's prior experience in the Jordanian market indicates that Jordanian people would feel more comfortable with personal contact than indirect approaches. Therefore, the researcher realised that he had to find another way to gain access to these companies to interview relevant managers. An effective way that worked very well for the researcher was searching for some relevant managers from the professional social networking site *LinkedIn*. This site allows viewers to search for professional people across different titles, industries and countries. The initial target was to secure 3-5 interviews during the first phase to conduct pilot interviews. Therefore, an email was sent to potential managers of solutions providers firms based on their title and their seniority level in the solutions business, inviting them to take part in an interview in the period of July 2016. The email also included an introduction about the researcher and the primary aim of this research. Initially, six emails were sent to different managers of leading firms operating in the ICT sector. These managers were involved in senior roles in technology-based solutions as evidenced from their professional career on LinkedIn.

Five managers from five supplier firms out of the six replied to the first email sent. Interestingly, all five managers welcomed the idea of getting in touch with them and showed their interest to take part in a face-to-face research interview. However, only one of those five managers scheduled a date and time for the interview and the four remaining asked the researcher to phone them personally upon arrival to Amman, Jordan, to schedule an interview appointment. When arriving in Amman, Jordan, on 06/07/2016, the researcher began contacting those managers who agreed to take part in this research on their mobile phone. These five managers responded and were interviewed within the first week of the visit to Jordan. As indicated above, the interview guide for the pilot study entailed some general questions that drew on previous

solutions marketing literature including solutions definition, characteristics, and the solutions marketing process to ensure the construct equivalence highlighted earlier. Subsequently, the researcher listened to these five pilot interviews promptly and conducted an initial manual analysis. The researcher, at this stage, aimed to get a feeling for how Jordanian suppliers view the Jordanian solutions market in the ICT sector.

As all five firms offer technology-based solutions in regional and international markets, managers reported similar understanding of customer solutions as understood in the western market in terms of customisation aspects, and collaborative process (i.e., value co-creation activities), thus fulfilling the concept equivalence to enhance the empirical findings inferred in this research (Hult et al., 2008). However, these managers reported that the Jordanian market is different from other international markets they operate in. For instance, all five managers highlighted that cultural issues have an impact on the customer solutions process. Furthermore, a phrase such as “*the market is immature enough to operate within the solutions market*” became a repetitive pattern among these interviews. Moreover, considering different types of solutions value propositions was essential in the ICT solutions sector. Accordingly, the researcher had to refine the pilot interview questions to fit with the specific issues raised by the pilot interviews (Granot, Brashear and Cesar Motta, 2012, p.549). Such modifications in the interview questions have been recognised as necessary when undertaking qualitative interviews where new themes and issues are likely to emerge (Eisenhardt, 1989).

- **Lessons learned from conducting the pilot study**

Overall, the pilot interviews conducted offered a number of benefits to the research design process as follows:

- ✓ The pilot interviews provided insights into various themes concerning extant solutions marketing literature including lack of customer readiness, offering multiple solution value propositions and some challenges associated with offering customer solutions.
- ✓ The researcher gained some experience on how to deal with interviewees who may shift to talk about things that are unrelated to the subject during the interviews.
- ✓ The pilot interviews showed that offering confidential treatment by offering informant consent only was not sufficient to gain participants' consent to take part in

the study. Jordanian business managers wanted to know more about the researcher beyond his name, and the provided research letter and his research. For instance, the researcher recognised that participants were keen to know the professional background of the researcher and the name of the institution that sponsors his research. Knowing such information gave them more confidence to take part in the interview process. Also, this was seen as important in establishing trust and rapport between the researcher and his participants, making them more comfortable to be recorded. This was important because the researcher was worried before going to Jordan whether participants would be willing to be recorded or not. This concern was raised as the researcher became aware that Arabian business managers are wary of questions related to business and political issues, leading them not to agree be recorded in research interviews (Berger et al., 2015).

- ✓ The researcher learned that some questions might not necessarily be understood appropriately by the interview participants and, hence, the researcher had to rephrase some questions for the next interviews. This is due to some translation issues where some theoretical phrases such as value co-creation/destruction activities cannot be easily translated into the same meaning in Arabic. Therefore, these areas received more attention in refining the interview questions at the following phase.

4.8.3 Main data collection

Given that qualitative interviewing is a dynamic and continuous process (Rubin and Rubin, 1995), the researcher built on the insights generated from the pilot interviewing and developed an interview guide (see appendix 1) to answer the four research questions. To recruit the study's participants, a purposive sample technique (e.g., Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller 2011; Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007) was adopted to recruit managers from provider and customer firms. Consequently, the leading ICT technology-based solutions providers' firms in the Jordanian ICT sector were targeted. The researcher's prior experience in the Jordanian market, particularly in the ICT sector, enabled him to identify these companies for the purpose of approaching them. Accordingly, the researcher physically visited another five firms headquartered in Amman, introducing himself to these companies and asking for the relevant persons to contact. This door-to-door visit was handy as the researcher got to know and meet some

relevant managers in the solutions business. In consequence, the majority of these managers were pleased to take part in this research as they expressed interest in the research topic.

In order to access more supplier firms that provide solutions in the ICT sector, a snowball sampling technique (Bernard, and Ryan, 2010) was adopted. Snowballing sampling technique refers to the process whereby researchers ask chosen participants to identify some suitable participants who have gained relevant expertise and can inform the study (Polkinghorne, 2005). This technique has been widely used in recruiting participants in business markets and industrial marketing research (e.g., Biggemann et al., 2013; Prior, 2015). Hence, the researcher asked the interview participants to provide him with some relevant supplier firms and contact persons.

In total, 44 interviews were conducted with customer and supplier representatives. Specifically, 28 interviews were conducted with managers from 17 solutions providers (identified with the prefix SP) firms (see Table 4.4) involved in marketing, sales, developing, managing, and deploying technology-based solutions. This variety of roles among providers' participants enabled collecting rich data from different aspects that are concerned with various phases within the co-creation process of customer solutions. Most importantly, most provider interviewees had worked serving both regional and global markets; enabling respondents to draw on experience that offered comparative insight into customer readiness in Jordan and other markets. Providers' interviewees had an average of 16 years of solutions experience. The individuals recruited for the study at providers' firms held various functional roles, and worked in diverse departments and at varying levels of hierarchy. Of these 28 interviews with providers' participants, one interview was as a follow-up interview with the sales manager of SP6. This follow-up interview was needed to discuss in more in depth (Carson et al., 2001) why adopting a multiple value propositions approach is important and how such an approach influences co-creation activities.

The selected providers offer a wide range of advanced technology-based solutions in the ICT sector that combine tangible components such as servers embedded in a network infrastructure with intangible elements such as software, cloud solutions and as-

sociated services. For example, one of SP9's software solutions is a supply chain management system that provides industry-specific solutions and processes; it also offers an incident management solution system designed to control, document and monitor customer claims and incidents. SP7 offers advanced malware protection, through network security firewalls and VPN and end-to-end security. SP3 offers end-to-end human capital information technology solutions and services including payroll and personal management, data and analytics and cloud-based solutions. SP4 offers an array of business solutions including Enterprise Application Integration (EAI), Business Process Management (BPM), Business Intelligence (BI), Project Management, Consultation, Custom Software Development, and Cloud Computing. S10 and SP5 offer telecom-based solutions including connectivity, fibre optics and Business VPN. SP8 provides solutions and services to the financial and banking sectors including core banking, mobile and internet banking, portfolio management, risk management, payments and financial messaging, and reporting solutions.

Table 4.4: *Solution provider interviewee characteristics*

Supplier number	Technology type/based solutions	Interviewee's position	Years of exp.	No. of employees	Company age in Jordanian market	Market served
SP1	Software solutions such as ERP and gas stations solutions;	Chief Executive Officer (Owner)	18	65	17	Jordan and the Middle East
SP2	solutions such as educational management software	Vice President/ Business Development	18	230	27	Jordan, Middle East, USA
SP3*	HR Software solutions	Marketing Manager Sales Manager	16 13	200	14	Jordan and Middle East
SP4	SharePoint solutions and Business intelligence	Projects Director	15	30	8	Jordan and Gulf

SP5**	Telecom service solutions	Pre-Sale Manager	15	2000	17	Jordan and global market
		Key Account Manager	22			
		SMEs Sales Team Leader	16			
SP6***	IT solutions including hardware and software	Pre-Sale Manager	16	300	26	Jordan and MENA Region
		Sales Manager	15			
		Marketing Manager	12			
	<i>Follow up interview</i>	Sales Manager	15			
SP7	IT Infrastructure and WIFI solutions; Software solutions	Managing Director / Co-founder	15	37	16	Jordan and Middle East
SP8	solutions for the Banking Industry	Group Chairman and CEO	25	50	24	Jordan and Global Market
SP9**	Software solutions for several industries	General Manager/ Co-founder	22	200	17	Jordan, Middle East, and Europe
		Sales and Business Development Director	10			
		Sales and Business Development Manager	8			
SP10	Telecom service solutions	Corporate Sales Manager	17	1000	14	Jordan and Middle East
SP11	Network and software solutions for several industries	Development Manager	10	65	12	Jordan

SP12	Digital marketing and software solutions;	Managing Director	22	60	14	Jordan
SP13*	Managing customer experience and CRM software solutions	Regional Sales Manager	10	150	15	Jordan and Middle East
		Business Development Manger	12			
SP14	Telecom business solutions	Marketing Director	20	500	17	Jordan and Middle East
SP15*	Telecom business solutions	Commercial Director	16	300	7	Jordan and MENA
		Business Development Manager	21			
SP16	Telecom and contact centre solutions	Marketing Team Leader	16	88	23	Jordan and Middle East
SP17*	Records management software solutions	Sales Account Manager	14	122	22	Jordan and MENA
		Sales Account Manager	15			

* Two interviews, ** Three interviews, *** Four interviews

In order to gain access to customer firms that had purchased customer solutions recently, the application of the snowball sampling technique (Bernard, and Ryan, 2010) was again utilised. Hence, provider firms were asked at the end of each interview to provide the researcher with one contact of their customer firms to interview. This procedure is consistent with extant value co-creation research in industrial markets (e.g., Sjödin, Parida and Wincent, 2016) where researchers aim at understanding how solu-

tions providers and their business customers perceive the collaborative process embedded in solutions value co-creation phases. In order to ensure interviewing relevant respondents from customer firms, providers were advised that these customer contacts must have been heavily involved in buying and interacting with their solutions providers when they purchased a customer solution.

Most Jordanian solutions providers showed an interest in understanding how Jordanian business buyers generally view their solutions and how they make their decision when buying solutions. This practical desire to understand how customers perceive and buy solutions resonates with the theoretical suggestion that calls to integrate customers' inputs of how they perceive their roles and make their decisions when buying solutions offerings (Brax and Jonsson, 2009; Raja et al., 2013). Hence, the investigator asked provider firms to phone the potential customer contact, informing them about this research and asking for their permission to allow the researcher to call them to arrange for research interviews.

From the researcher's perspective, this procedure to gain access to customer firms was useful given that it is difficult to secure a research interview with business practitioners in Jordan if the interviewee does not know the researcher. This approach resonates with the important interpersonal relationships between Arabs highlighted in the previous chapter which serves as enabler to gain access to different types of resources. Hence, providers made phone calls with their customer contacts recommending the researcher be allowed to gain access to conduct research interviews. Customer firms who agreed to take part in this study were subsequently given the researcher's name and contact details by their solutions provider. In turn, solutions providers passed on their customers' contacts who agreed to take part in this study.

Subsequently, the researcher phoned these customers' contacts received by solutions providers to introduce himself and schedule research interviews. As a result, this process generated 16 interviews conducted with customers (identified with the prefix C) at 14 firms (see Table 4.5) involved in decision-making, deployment, purchasing and/or using solutions. While all of the interviews were conducted face-to-face in Jordan with provider and customer participants, the interview with C14 was conducted through Skype in December 2018 in an attempt to further elaborate on the influence

of Arabian business culture on the customer solutions process. Overall, customer interviewees had an average of 16.2 years of experience in their specific area. However, as the research progressed it became clear that most customers lacked experience in the solutions they had purchased as these solutions were not related to their core business processes.

Table 4.5: *Customer interviewee characteristics*

Cus- tomer number	Solution (s) purchased	Inter- viewee's po- sition	Years of experi- ence	Number of em- ployees
C1*	Pharmaceutical soft- ware system solution	IT Manager	10	450
		Marketing Manager	15	
C2*	ERP software solution	GM/Partner IT Manager	22 14	180
C3	ERP software solution and IP camera security solution	IT Manager	14	150
C4	Business intelligence and web solutions	Projects Manager	18	20
C5	Considering buying Business Intelligence Software solution	Financial Manger	12	170
C6	SharePoint software	Go to Market Leader	15	2500
C7	Human resource soft- ware solution	Human Re- sources Sys- tem Manager	17	4200
C8	ERP and financial soft- ware solution	Financial Manager	15	500
C9	Core banking software solution	IT Manager	20	2000

C10	Customer relationship management software solution	Marketing Manager	18	750
C11	Telecom business solution	IT manger	19	45
C12	Workforce optimisation software	Senior Human Resource Officer	18	800
C13	Digitised document management system	Project Manager	12	62
C14	Supply chain management software	Purchasing Manager	18	160

* Two interviews

During the interviews, customer and provider firm participants were briefed about the concept of value co-creation embedded in the well-established solutions value co-creation phases (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007). Subsequently, respondents were instructed to reflect on their understanding of their roles and their experiences about the challenges and problems experienced by them or their parties throughout the co-creation phases that led to unpleasant co-creation experiences; that is, value co-destruction. Provider and customer interviews were conducted at the participants' premises, at a time of their convenience, during official working hours.

Collectively, a total of 44 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted during the fieldwork with 17 suppliers and 14 customers' organisations. All the interviews took place in one-to-one settings with the objective of gathering detailed information from customer and provider representatives in relation to their individual solutions experiences (Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011; Petri and Jacob, 2016). Although accessing other firms for taking part in this study was still possible, interviewing stopped when a point of theoretical saturation was reached. Theoretical saturation occurs when interviews add no or a marginal increase to the researcher's knowledge and findings (Eisenhardt, 1989). In this study, the theoretical saturation was achieved when

the same themes became recurring and when it was evident that enough data was collected to ensure the research questions can be answered. Most interviews were conducted in the Arabic language to suit participants since using participants' language *"is crucial to put the interviewee at ease and elicit authentic response"* (Welch and Piekkari, 2006, p.420). In addition, using the Arabic language helped participants feel comfortable when expressing authentic experiences and, also, this approach enabled the researcher to establish a good rapport with interviewees (Tsang, 1998; Welch and Piekkari, 2006). However, the interview with SP8 was conducted in the English language as per the manager's preference. The researcher felt that this manager chose the English language due to his long work experience in the USA market.

The interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes on average. All interviews were recorded after receiving participants' permission (Bryman, 2015) except one interview with one of the customer firms (C5). Although this interview was not recorded, this interview was transcribed based on extensive notetaking. After the interview, major points were highlighted with this participant and she was offered to see the notes taken to ensure accuracy. The researcher made conscious attempts to minimise the potential of bias and ensuring participants reveal their thoughts and views while conducting the interviews. To do so, different types of interview questions were utilised to gain maximum information from the study's participants. For instance, in addition to open and closed questions, probes were utilised by the researcher (Collis and Hussey, 2009) to elaborate further on certain areas (i.e. "what do you mean?" and "can you give an example of this?"). Moreover, given that the researcher had previously worked in selling and marketing telecom business services, he was conscious that his experience could influence interpreting participants' statements. Therefore, the researcher sought to avoid such potential sources of bias by seeking elaboration of meaning and issues directly from interviewed participants.

In addition, through the offer of complete confidentiality and informing participants that their responses will be dealt anonymously, respondents were encouraged to be analytical and critical in expressing their views in order to identify new and profound business issues (Ryan et al., 2012). Assurance of confidentiality was important to minimise social desirability bias which could lead to results distortion (Richman et al., 1999).

After the researcher returned to the UK⁹, all the interviews were transcribed and translated by the researcher as soon as possible. The next section explains the procedures followed by the researcher with regard to interview transcription and translation.

4.9 Procedures relating to transcription and translation

Transcribing in qualitative interviews is the process whereby researchers transform the spoken words into a written form or word-processed text (Saunders et al., 2012). Each interview in this study was first transcribed verbatim into Arabic and then translated into English by the researcher. The Arabic transcription was necessary in the first place as the researcher initially aimed at immersing himself in the tone and context involved in the verbal communication during interviews. Although this was a time-consuming process, this was important as it helped the researcher to stay as close as possible to the data in the Arabic language and to maintain what was experienced and observed during the interview process (Al-Amer et al., 2016). In order to save time while completing the interview transcription, the researcher utilised a web-based software known as (Transcribe-wreally) to transcribe verbal data into word-processed text. This software helped the researcher through offering a multi-lingual audio player that is configured with the text editor on the same screen. The interview transcriptions in the Arabic language were then translated into the English language by the researcher himself.

It is worth noting that qualitative scholars involved in cross-language research often encounter many challenges in relation to translation such as accuracy, preserving participants' meanings and experiences in their context (Temple and Young, 2004). The researcher responded to this issue by making the decision to translate the Arabic transcription himself as he is Jordanian and shares the same language and culture with the research participants (Temple, 2002). This enabled him to capture participants' feelings and experiences embedded in their verbal communication and, thus, reducing translation inaccuracy (Al-Amer et al., 2016). Further, the researcher's previous experience in selling and marketing telecommunications solutions, besides the subject

⁹ The researcher went back to the UK after conducting the fieldwork on 30/08/2016

knowledge he gained during his studies, enabled him to relate participants' experiences to the conceptual framework of solutions value co-creation activities.

However, conveying the same message when translating qualitative interviews has long been recognised as a difficult task (Temple and Young, 2004; Welch and Piekari, 2006). Specifically, the Arabic language has been characterised with a complex linguistic structure, causing a translation challenge (Al-Amer et al., 2016). Therefore, given that the English language is not the mother tongue for the researcher, a specific procedure was taken to ensure meaningful translation and to minimise errors in interpretation (Hult et al., 2008). First, the researcher asked two postgraduate students at Heriot-Watt University who were studying translation studies and whose mother language is English to go through the translated interviews to check their accuracy and to eliminate inconsistencies.

This was a helpful procedure for the researcher as he met them frequently over a period of three weeks and answered their questions with regard to translated transcriptions. This interactive process resulted in some modifications of the words and phrases to improve the quality of the translation while preserving the meaning of participants' experiences in the original and translated data. Subsequently, the researcher asked another doctoral student in the business management department at Heriot-Watt University to read through the translated interviews in order to check the conceptual equivalence.

In summary, taking all above procedures followed in the translation process was paramount as the reliability of cross language-research depends on the accuracy of the translation procedures taken by qualitative researchers (Al-Amer et al., 2016). Having explained data collection procedures and described procedures taken in relation to transcription and translation, the next section discusses the data analysis technique followed in this study.

4.10 Data Analysis

A qualitative data analysis process aims at making sense of qualitative data by determining patterns and relationships that demonstrate participants' views with regard to

a particular phenomenon. Unlike a quantitative data analysis process which is based on meanings derived from numbers, the qualitative data analysis process is largely based on meanings through words. Generally, *thematic analysis* has been widely used by qualitative researchers as a broad approach to qualitative data analysis (King, and Brooks, 2016). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns and themes that are derived from qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In addition to thematic analysis, there are also a number of approaches which are available to qualitative researchers to analyse and interpret qualitative data. The appropriateness of any of these approaches for a particular study is often dependent on the research aim and methodology adopted. Table 4.6 below outlines some of these approaches and identifies the most suitable analytical technique for this study (template analysis).

Table 4.6: *Selected approaches to analyse qualitative data*

Data analysis approach	Description	Relevant for this study?
Grounded Theory	An approach that aims to develop a grounded theory that emerges from data. This approach has been considered as time consuming as it views the coding process as a progression through a series of stages.	No. Given that the grounded theory methodology is commenced with no explicit theory from existing research, this analytical approach is discarded because data analysis in this research is driven by prior customer solution conceptualisation.
Narrative analysis	An analytical approach which is used when the researcher views the experience of their participants as complete stories or narratives rather than as fragmented data. This approach allows chronological connections and the sequencing of events as told by the narrator to be preserved.	No. This approach was also considered unsuitable because the researcher sought to understand the experience of his participants by responding to a series of pre-developed questions rather than seeking narrative stories. This resulted in fragmented units of data, which is inconsistent with the requirements of narrative analysis.
Discourse analysis	This approach is concerned with the analysis of language (discourse). It focuses on understanding how language (i.e., talk and text) is used to construct and change aspects of the world.	No. Irrelevant for the primary aim of this research.
Template analysis	A template is a list of codes or categories that represent the themes derived from data that have been collected. Unlike a grounded theory approach where themes are grounded in data, a template analysis technique is used when researchers use predetermined concepts and themes to guide data collection and analysis processes.	Yes. This approach is considered the most suitable technique for this study as the data collection and analysis process was largely driven by predefined concepts in existing research (i.e., value co-creation of customer solutions).

Source: (Adapted from: Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012)

The following section further justifies the use of template analysis and describes the procedures taken.

4.10.1 Template Analysis – Rationale

Template analysis was developed by Nigel King and has been defined as a style of thematic analysis that “*seeks to balance flexibility and structure in how it handles textual data*” (King, and Brooks, 2016, p.3). The basic principle of template analysis is developing a list of codes (referred to as the template) which are organised in a hierarchical structure to provide a general overview with more details about the sub-codes of the investigated phenomenon (Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe and Jackson, 2012; Brooks et al., 2015). A code in qualitative research is a label that is attached to a passage to index it as to relating to a certain theme. A theme is neither identified by the frequency of occurrence across interview participants, nor the depth of conversation on the theme, but whether it captures an important element concerning research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

In this sense, the aim of the template analysis is to produce a list of structural codes or categories that can extensively capture the richest data in relation to the research question. Template analysis emphasises using a priori themes which serve as a theoretical framework while still adopting an inductive approach during data analysis. While using such a priori themes is not obligatory to use template analysis, utilising them at the initial template phase is useful as it guides the process of coding and template development (King, and Brooks, 2016). However, it is worth noting that using predefined themes does not necessarily mean that these themes should remain in the final template as such themes “*may need to be redefined or even discarded*” during analysis (King, and Brooks, 2016, p.30).

Template analysis has been widely used in organisational and management research (Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe and Jackson, 2012; Brooks et al., 2015). In particular, template analysis has been utilised in industrial and B2B marketing research to understand relationship value in business markets (e.g., Corsaro and Snehota, 2010) and to propose a managerial approach to identify and target customers in solutions markets

(e.g., Windler et al., 2016). Overall, the template analysis technique is considered to be suitable in this study for two reasons.

First, the application of template analysis is not restricted to a distinct research philosophy but, rather, is a generic analytical method that can be utilised in qualitative research from a range of philosophical stances (King, and Brooks, 2016). Therefore, adopting this approach of analysis ensures there are no philosophical and methodological contradictions in this study. Second, template analysis is a flexible tool and does not emphasise a fixed number of levels of coding hierarchy, enabling researchers to gain deeper understanding of detailed issues within the main research question. In other words, template analysis encourages researchers to develop more relevant codes and categories in relation to the research question (King, 2012).

Overall, using the template procedures allowed the researcher to explore the richest aspects of data, generating four distinct but intertwined themes pertaining to the value co-creation trajectories within a B2B customer solutions context. As a result, the final template incorporated four relevant major themes: value co-creation phases, solutions value propositions, the impact of Arabian business culture; and, value co-destruction, respectively.

Having defined the template analysis technique followed in this study, the next subsection describes the software used in helping the researcher in codifying and organising the collected interview data.

4.10.2 NVivo software

The process of qualitative data analysis is predominantly seen as a daunting task due to the large amount of unstructured narrative texts being collected (Carson et al., 2001). Advances in information technology have led to development of various computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) that are designed to facilitate qualitative data analysis. NVivo, Atlas.ti and MAXQDA software are among those widely used among qualitative researchers. The qualitative analysis software NVivo was used by the researcher in this study to organise and codify the large

amounts of narrative texts collected from customer and provider interviews. Moreover, utilising this software allowed the researcher to search and retrieve materials needed throughout the analysis process. For instance, it would have been difficult to capture and keep a record of all of the patterns derived from data without using qualitative data analysis software. Hence, using this software was needed to avoid an incomplete and inaccurate analysis. Also, the software enabled the researcher to report from the data and to visualise the relationships among various themes (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). However, it is important to point out that using software packages does not perform the analysis, per se, but helps in organising data and makes the analysis process more effective and efficient (Gummesson, 2003).

4.10.3 *Template Analysis (Procedures)*

In this research, the major data analysis process started shortly after the data collection stage. Given that the main focus of the thesis is on the collaborative process embedded in the co-creation process, the unit of analysis for this study is an *exchange episode* which resulted from solutions marketing and buying activities. King and Brooks (2016) propose seven phases that enable the researcher to produce a high-quality analysis process when utilising template analysis. Table 4.7 outlines these phases and describes how they were applied to this study.

Table 4.7: *Phases of Template Analysis*

Phase of template analysis	Application to present study	Example
Familiarisation with data	Prior to translation of the data to English, the researcher listened to each interview recording twice. This was followed by transcribing them into Arabic before translating them into English. Given that all of these activities were performed by the researcher himself, this enabled him to become familiar with the data.	
Preliminary coding	King and Brooks (2016) suggest that this phase begins with a subset of the data, especially if the researcher has gathered a large amount of textual data. Accordingly, predefined themes from literature (piori) and emerging themes from data (posteriori) are added into the NVivo	<i>Priori themes:</i> Problem and need definition, signalling, requirement definition, customisation and integration, deployment and post-deployment <i>Posteriori themes:</i>

	software based on transcriptions of six interviews with supplier firms and four interviews with customer firms. Priori themes encompassed predefined theoretical findings from previous literature whereas posteriori included themes and concepts derived from the data.	Customer education, challenges embedded in solutions exchanges
Clustering	Following preliminary coding, the emerging and priori themes were clustered into meaningful groups. Using the NVivo software was significantly helpful at this stage as it allowed the researcher to create emerging subthemes and attach them into the predefined ones.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Solution process: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 Customer education 1.2 Value demonstration 2. Solutions value proposition <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 SMEs 2.2 Large enterprise
Producing an initial template	The clusters of the themes at this stage provides the basis of the initial template. The initial template serves as a basis of hierarchical organisation of the themes included in each cluster. However, the researcher's aim at this stage was to keep the template simple. This is important as it allowed the researcher to continue to keep an open mind when approaching new patterns in the remaining transcripts. In addition, this made the researcher focus more on the data than to create a more appealing template.	(See Appendix 2)
Developing the template	The researcher continued reading the remaining scripts and coding new emerging patterns and themes. The development process also included some modifications, adding and deleting some codes and themes. It was evident that some clusters had links with other clusters. For instance, the cluster of customer readiness had an impact on the solution process through proposing four roles performed by solutions providers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The theme of problem and need definition was deleted from the final template, reflecting customer limitations in operating within solution markets. - A multiple solution value propositions approach was added. - The codes of <i>wasta</i> connections and sharing accurate information were attached to the cultural issues theme
Applying the final template	Once all data set is coded and no more major changes of the themes are needed, the final template can be applied to guide	(See Appendix 3)

	the data interpretation process. Nevertheless, the possibility is always open to refine some codes in qualitative data, which depend on the interpreter.	
Writing up	The researcher used the final template to guide the writing up process. King and Brooks (2016) suggest that the template should be the basis to develop the findings rather than as a product itself. Hence, the researcher paid more attention to how the findings answer the research questions rather than how the template themes are organised. This was demonstrated by thinking how to prioritise themes and find some links among them.	The researcher changed the order of the “impact of Arabian culture” from theme number four to theme number three due to its importance and offering new insights to current theory. In addition, the researcher realised that some value co-destruction practices may be triggered by some cultural behaviors.

Source: (King and Brooks 2016)

4.10.4 Research Quality and Credibility

Scientific research aims at creating reliable knowledge that provides sufficient understanding of the empirical phenomena that interest society in general and social scientists in particular (Milliken, 2001). However, achieving this aim requires researchers to apply various techniques to improve the quality and credibility of their research findings. Generally, quantitative researchers use different criteria to evaluate the quality and credibility of their research to qualitative researchers. While the former seeks to establish valid measurements of a social phenomenon, the latter seeks to ensure that the interpretations they present are rigorously supported (Bryman, 2015). Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose four criteria that should be considered by qualitative researchers to improve the trustworthiness of their studies. These criteria and how they were met in this study are summarised in table Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: *Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research*

Criteria	Definition and description	How each criterion was met in this study?
Credibility	This criterion is one of the most important factors in establishing a trustworthiness study. It describes the procedures taken by the researcher to demonstrate a true picture of the phenomenon. It also means extent to which	<p>✓ <i>Member Checking:</i> Interviewees were sent drafts of transcriptions and were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the findings.</p> <p>✓ <i>Data Source Triangulation:</i> Provider and customer participants held various roles and responsibility. This was important to ensure covering all the co-</p>

	findings are congruent with reality.	<p>creation phases embedded in the customer solution process where every phase is relevant to certain members. In addition, the dataset involved both customer and supplier insights. This ensured that viewpoints and experiences are verified against each other.</p> <p>✓ <i>Response Confidentiality</i>: Interviewees were informed that their statements will be anonymous. By doing so, it was hoped that participants express their real experiences, thus minimising social desirability bias.</p>
Transferability	The extent to which a researcher provides sufficient details of the context of the fieldwork to enable readers to make judgements about the possibility of transferring findings to other contexts.	<p>✓ <i>Thick Description</i>: Detailed description of the Jordanian solution market and its surrounded context (e.g., the impact of political instability) preceded the data analysis process (see section 5.2). Moreover, the findings demonstrated an Arabian business culture context highlighting the influence of such a culture on the customer solution process.</p>
Dependability	This criterion is concerned with keeping a research record that describes the entire research process from problem generation to research conclusions. Researchers should strive to enable readers to develop a thorough understanding of the methods used and their effectiveness.	<p>✓ The research design and how it was executed were described in detail. For example, the importance of pilot interviewing and the lessons learned were documented. Further, the researcher described how he gained access to customer and supplier participants. In addition, procedures followed when data transcribed and translated were also presented.</p>
Confirmability	This criterion is concerned with being objective. Although recognising complete objectivity is impossible in qualitative research, researchers should ensure that their findings are derived from the experiences and ideas of the informants not from their predisposition.	<p>✓ The findings chapter (chapter 5) provided rich accounts of participants' perceptions to ensure that participants' experience drive themes generated.</p> <p>✓ Discussions were held with two post-graduate students to ensure translation accuracy and eliminate inconsistencies.</p> <p>✓ Methodological limitations have been acknowledged (see, section 4.12).</p>

Source: Based on (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Shenton, 2004; Bryman, 2015)

4.11 Research Ethics

Research ethics refer to the moral principles employed by researchers while planning, conducting and reporting their findings (Myers, 2009). In this sense, researchers should be honest and responsible about their research methods and their findings. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) suggest that there are two important ethical issues which researchers need to consider when carrying out a scientific research; procedural ethics and ethics in practice. While the former procedure concerns gaining approval from the

relevant institution to carry out the research, the latter is concerned with the ethical issues that emerge during the research process.

With regard to the procedural ethics, the study has received full ethical approval by Heriot-Watt University (see Appendix 4). Moreover, given that social researchers are highly exposed to interact with people when conducting their research projects, various procedures were followed to adhere to ethics in practice while conducting this study. First, participants initially were provided with information on how their statements and data will be collected and stored securely, confidentially and anonymously. This was maintained through ensuring that the interviewees' personal information, audio recordings and interview transcripts were stored on a secure server.

In addition, participants were given a letter offering insurance that the collected data were to be dealt with confidentially (see Appendix 5). Offering this letter was essential in this research since the pilot study showed that some informants asked for such a letter to feel comfortable in giving out sensitive business information. Second, the researcher informed the participants before they took part in this research that they were free to participate (Myers, 2009).

4.12 Methodological Limitations

This short section outlines the methodological limitations embedded in this research in the qualitative data collection process. The first limitation concerned the number of informants employed from each supplier and customer firm. It can be noticed from Table 4.4 and Table 4.5 as described earlier, that choosing a single informant was relatively dominant in the interview procedure particularly with customers' firms. It can be argued that the reliability and validity issues when employing a single informant research to represent the opinions of a group can be questionable as a methodological procedure (Wilson, and Lilien, 1992).

However, this limitation can be addressed by recruiting the most knowledgeable and relevant persons in the phenomenon under investigation when applying the single informant procedure (Sharfman, 1998). Following this suggestion, the researcher ensured that his interview participants were knowledgeable about solutions exchanges

as they were heavily involved in solutions activities. This was demonstrated through the seniority level of the informants in suppliers' firms (Mitchell, 1994) who work in solutions exchange in local and international markets. Also, customers' informants were chosen based on their relevance and involvement in buying, implementing and using technology-based solutions.

Therefore, the purpose was not initially to interview as many possible participants in each firm but, rather, those managers who were involved in the process of marketing and buying a customer solution at various levels and roles. Overall, applying one informant from customer or/and supplier firms in this study is largely consistent with the current solution marketing research when investigating the collaborative process of customer solutions (e.g., Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Petri and Jacob, 2016).

The second limitation was access to customer firm participants. Although most Jordanian suppliers were excited to know how their customers behave when they make a decision about solution purchase, it is worth noting that some supplier participants showed reluctance to provide the researcher with one customer contact in the first instance. This is because these providers were concerned about the type of questions to be asked of their business customers about their business relationships. Hence, the researcher had to assure solutions providers that customer contacts would be asked about their decision-making process, value drivers and their perception of the interactive process when buying customer solutions.

The third limitation the researcher encountered while collecting data relates to interview cancellations and appointment rescheduling. Given that the informants were senior in their organisations and involved in many tasks and responsibilities, some of the scheduled interviews were either cancelled or re-scheduled. Therefore, the researcher showed a high degree of flexibility by contacting participants again and rescheduling the interview appointments.

4.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed description of the philosophical issues and methods used in this study to answer the research questions. Given that the primary aim of this study is to gain an understanding of value co-creation trajectories with B2B customer solutions offered in less mature markets, an interpretive perspective with an inductive approach was adopted. A qualitative research design for data collection and analysis was chosen. In particular, semi-structured interviews were used as a major technique to collect data in this study. In addition, this chapter introduced the template analysis technique and justified its suitability for this study. Table 4.9 summarises the key philosophical and methodological decisions followed in this research.

Table 4.9: *Summary of the methodological decisions*

Aspect	The choice made
Philosophy	Inteprevistism
Theoretical reasoning	Induction Approach
Context	B2B Customer Solutions in LCRM, ICT sector, Arabian markets, Jordan
Research design	Qualitative Approach
Data collection technique	Semi-Structured Interviews
Data analysis approach	Template Analysis
Unit of analysis	Exchange Episode

Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

The primary aim of this thesis was to develop a better understanding of value co-creation trajectories within B2B customer solutions in LCRMs. Specifically, the research questions were:

RQ1: What influence, if any, does low customer readiness in solutions markets have on the role of the provider in the solutions value co-creation process?

RQ2: How does adopting a multiple customer solution value propositions approach influence value communication and co-creation activity?

RQ3: How does an Arabian business culture impact the solutions value co-creation process?

RQ4: What provider and customer practices lead to destroying value co-creation experiences in solution exchanges?

To answer these research questions, 44 semi-structured interviews were conducted with provider and customer firms that were involved in marketing and buying technology-based solution offerings in the Jordanian ICT sector. This chapter presents the analysis of the interview data. The first section in this chapter presents the empirical evidence that explains why the Jordanian ICT sector is an immature market and highlights customer limitations in performing their roles effectively in the co-creation. This is followed by delineating the providers' role in increasing customer readiness to operate effectively within this market through applying the established value co-creation phases of customer solutions. Next, the influence of adopting a multiple solutions value propositions approaches on the co-creation activities will be presented. Subsequently, the fourth section of this chapter shows how Arabian business culture influences solutions co-creation activities. Finally, the last section reports on some provider and customer practices that lead to suboptimal co-creation experiences.

This chapter utilises quotes from customer and supplier participants to make sense of how both parties engaged in solutions exchanges. The chosen extracts in this chapter have been selected for being the most explanatory and descriptive of the researcher's conceptual interpretation of the data.

5.2 Providers' and customers' view of customer solutions and customer readiness in the Jordanian market

Solutions providers and customers in the Jordanian ICT sector appeared to have similar understanding as to how the concept was defined in the current western solution literature. In their understanding of a customer solution, providers highlighted various aspects such as responding to a customer's business needs, customisation and ongoing relationship process. According to the general manager of a supplier firm that offers software banking solution:

"Basically, our understanding of a solution is to address certain requirements by our customers and that solution is usually an ongoing relationship between the vendor and the customer. So, it not really a onetime product or package to customer. But rather you basically offer a solution to address their issue and continue having a relationship through a support or maintenance contract with the customer". (SP8)

While the above definition provides a comprehensive view that captures a solution characteristics identified in the previous literature (see Figure 2.1), other managers of supplier firms defined the concept from their functional experience. A pre-sales manager whose company operates within the telecommunications sector distinguished a solution from a stand-alone product through the means of the customisation aspect:

"Solutions are about something customised to the customer not from off the shelf products. We take requirements from customers and we analyse it and match it with our available options and solutions". (SP5)

Customers, in turn, defined a customer solution in technology-based solutions through the added value they obtained during the use of a certain solution (value-in-use). C2 is a big restaurant chain that operates in Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Dubai and purchased different types of software solutions including Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software solution and point of sales system. The general manager of this firm defines a customer solution as:

“Solutions primarily are tools to help you to run your current business effectively and help you to grow. Software solutions give you more accurate results and reduce the intervention of the human factor and therefore reducing human errors”. (C2)

C9 is a large bank in Jordan which purchased a software banking solution that is core in their business process. The IT manager of this customer firm aligned the definition of a customer solution to the industry they operate within:

“In the banking industry, a solution is any piece of software which helps us in adding security and monitoring standards that facilitate procedures or increase productivity. This software solution is a response to business need which prompts us to consider buying solutions”. (C9)

However, regarding customer readiness to co-create value, a common view among interviewees was that the Jordanian ICT solution market is characterised by low customer readiness. Interviews with Jordanian provider and customer firms highlighted different customer limitations that hinder them from operating effectively within the ICT solution market and from performing their co-creation roles. At the early phase of the solution value co-creation phases, customers and providers were found to have different value orientations towards solutions exchange. The data indicated that while solutions providers primarily focus on total cost of ownership (TCO) and performance outcomes from sourcing and using the solution (value-in-use), Jordanian business customers increasingly tend to put more emphasis on short term orientations such solution price (value-in-exchange). The business development manager stated:

“We usually explain to customers that in the long term our solutions will save a good deal of money and enhance performance. However, the problem is that the customer in Jordan [is] looking at short-term expenses [more] than what they will gain from these solutions in two or three years, they do not plan for these issues effectively”. (SP2)

Interviews with business customers confirmed that sourcing strategies and buying behaviour of the Jordanian solutions customers remain largely driven by price at the point of exchange. The IT manager of a customer firm agrees with the previous quote

and explains how price-driven sourcing may lead to them having inferior solutions and suboptimal performance:

“Prior to my work for XXX Company, I have worked in a company where the decision-maker was in the process of supplying a website solution for that firm. I remember he was negotiating with the leading company in Jordan that offers this type of solution. However, given that we had various requirements that would have made this solution cost us approximately, JD 20000, the manager had to give up some important requirements and ended up with an inferior provider. Unfortunately, most of decision-makers here in Jordan have the tendency to be extremely price driven”. (C1)

Similarly, at 2500 employees, C6 purchased a SharePoint technology-based solution to provide its staff members with centralised access to company information and content related to their roles. While discussing factors that affected their decision to buy this solution, the manager, who is in charge of implementing this solution, acknowledged that their solution provider was not the best:

“We were governed by a particular budget, we weighted our needs according to the budget we had, our supplier was a small company and not the best, but in light of our budget and requirements’ [that supplier] was the best price with our requirements”. (C6)

Jordanian customers’ emphasis on the price at the point of exchange was found to put suppliers’ profit margins at risk. While solutions providers expect that the solution price should recover the incremental costs of customisation and integration, customers tend to negotiate at unacceptable price levels. The managing director of SP7 explained:

“Sharing cost information is a challenge here in Jordan. If I tell them [Customers] the cost is this amount of money and my profit is this percentage, they pressure us to reduce our profit. However, there is no provider that can work for only a two percent profit from a solution, this is really frustrating”. (SP7)

According to the supplier interviews, customers’ emphasis on solutions price over the value outcomes obtained from using the solution represents a major challenge for any

firm that provides customised solutions in Jordan. The managing director of a supplier firm described the Jordanian software solutions sector;

“The Jordanian market represents a huge challenge for us, it is very price sensitive and customers cannot afford really very sophisticated large solutions, so you end [up having] to cut corners to serve the market because the market is not rich enough to afford large sophisticated solutions”. (SP8)

Therefore, it is unsurprising to find that the vast majority of the interviewed Jordanian solution providers (see Table 4.4) concentrate on other regional and global solutions markets. As illustrated by a business development manager:

“Although we have a good base of customer firms in Jordan, we cannot rely only on the Jordanian market to grow and survive. The market is relatively small, and customers are price conscious. We see our market in the Gulf and the USA is more promising”. (SP2)

Two discrete reasons emerged from the dataset that explain why customers tend to focus on value-in-exchange (solution price) and lack the willingness to invest in technology-based solutions. First, both solutions providers and customers agree that the recent political uncertainty surrounding Jordan (e.g., Iraq and Syria) has affected customers’ willingness to invest in heavily customised solution:

“I can understand the customer emphasis on the price. The economic situation here in Jordan is discouraging. Customers are highly affected by the political situation in the area and this affects their purchasing power. They seem not to be sure how the business would look after five years”. (SP9)

Similarly, a project manager of C4 emphasises the impact of the current political instability in the Middle East on customers’ financial resources and their purchasing power:

“Due to the political conflict in the region, I notice most companies large and small try to cut down the cost and stop making changes in their businesses to see what is going to happen in the region”. (C4)

The second important factor that hinders Jordanian business customers to leverage their financial resources is lack of awareness of the value of software solutions. The general manager of C2 who purchased a customised ERP software solution acknowledged that he was reluctant to invest heavily in this solution and believes that not all Jordanian business owners and decision makers realise the value of software solutions:

“Let me admit that we saw it [ERP software] as very expensive in the beginning, but here is the compromise, when you tell yourself I will buy an intangible software which will cost me thousands of Dollars you feel it a huge number, but when you think how this solution will organise your work and how much it will enable you to grow your business and make it a high standards model, you say it is worth paying. Many of my friends ask me why do you pay this amount of money for that. I think it is always based on the owners and decision conviction”. (C2)

Interestingly, the above quote demonstrates software intangibility as an industry-related variable that overlaps with lack of customer willingness to invest heavily in customised software solutions. The projects director of SP4 similarly explained further:

“The worst thing about software solutions is its intangibility. You are actually handing over a running application. But the mentality here in Jordan is that this should not cost a lot of money. They do not understand how much effort you have put forward to develop this software”. (SP4)

Moving to the requirement definition stage of the solution co-creation phases (see Figure 2.4), the interviews indicated that the limitations that prevent Jordanian customers from operating effectively and co-creating value with their solutions providers in the ICT solutions market, continue into this phase. Extant research carried out in HCRMs (e.g., Petri and Jacob, 2016) suggests that business buyers have a clear picture of the solution objective before the joint requirements definition. According to the solutions providers and customers in Jordan, however, business customers lack the clarity on their solutions scope and objectives affecting their ability to integrate and share their

resources with their solution providers. Some interviewees argued that the high information asymmetry in technology-based solutions between the customer and the supplier influences the customers' ability to articulate their solutions requirements effectively:

"Though we are a large bank, it does not mean that we should be familiar with the latest technology. We always send invitations to vendors for presentations and awareness sessions to broaden our mind and build an envisage regarding latest high value solutions. For example, we tend to think in a solution that only covers 10 items, but when we meet vendors, we find the same solution covers 50 items we did not even think about". (C9)

Others agree with the customer statement above on the impact of information asymmetry but also relate customers' inability to have a clear picture of their requirements to the negotiation process followed in this Arabian market. Solutions providers emphasised that customers tend to listen and negotiate their needs with several solutions providers simultaneously. However, inexperienced customers were found to have unrealistic and inaccurate customer requirements. The business development manager of SP2 commented on this point:

"In Jordan, customers negotiate and communicate with various solutions providers and they collect all solutions features. Then they come to us with a list of wishes by requesting all features. They think they are smart by requesting all features without proper planning to their needs of these features. Eventually, it turns out that some requirements come from no need". (SP2)

At the deployment and post-deployment technology-based solutions, both customer and provider firms highlighted Jordanian customer limitations in adopting their technology-based solutions effectively. Jordanian customers' users appeared to not adopt providers' offerings easily at their operations process. This was found to negatively affect customers' ability to utilise a solution's value-in-use. At 4,200 employees, C7 reported that their users served as barriers in adopting their HRM software solution:

“Unfortunately, some of the users have the mentality that if we buy this solution, it would replace them, it took us a long time to train, convince and implement the solution”. (C7)

C1 is a leading pharmaceutical chain in Jordan and purchased a pharmaceutical system solution which was meant to be used by all pharmacists. However, the IT manager of C1 illustrated that implementing the new pharmaceutical software system solution would not have been achieved without the intervention of his general manager:

“An obvious example was taken by Dr. AA [the general manager] who circulated a clear message to our pharmacists and staff saying literally, “Stop adopting a negative attitude about the application of the system; please deal with it and move on. Personally, I think that was a necessary intervention by him to convey the top management’s vision that the solution should be adopted and applied effectively”. (C1)

In summary, the preceding statements describe how Jordanian customers may lack readiness to operate effectively within the ICT solutions sector throughout all the customer solution value co-creation phases. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the size of the Jordanian market and customer limitations were found to influence what solutions providers actually offered. Rather than offering highly customised solutions for every individual customer, providers were genuinely offering highly standardised technology-based solutions:

“I am really against trying to develop and create new solutions from scratch because most [of our] customers do not know what they want, when we sit down with them, we understand their business needs, and their needs are [already] available in our pre-determined solutions portfolio”. (S10)

Although the solutions offered were highly standardised, solutions providers stressed that the customisation aspect of a certain solution occurs by carefully selecting and configuring the optimum solution components for each individual customer:

“All our products are industrialised in different sectors, but we do minor customisation, each customer has distinctive needs even if they work in the same field”. (SP3)

Supplier number 8 provides core banking software solutions and estimated the amount of customisation to be a maximum of 20%:

“Predominantly, our clients ask for 15 to 20 % customisation of our predefined solutions as they have very specific processes”. (S8)

The suppliers explained that developing such industrialised solutions enables them to achieve solutions scalability and repeatability. In the words of the general manager of a software solutions company:

“We overcome tailoring solutions to each customer by converting it to products and designing a flexible platform enough from the first phase initiation and design in a way that holds the adaptation for all companies in a certain sector”. (S9)

A pre-sale manager whose company provides telecommunications solutions gives an example of how his company tailors solutions offerings upon the industrialised ones:

“Our normal tailor made offer (TMO) is basically built on the existing core network solutions that we have. We customise and amend based on the core network, for instance in IPVPN service solution the core is the same but its customisation and integration varies”. (SP5)

On the other hand, while talking about solutions characteristics in the ICT sector, solutions providers viewed their solution offerings differently in terms of the complexity. While providers such as SP6, SP7 and SP11 viewed their solutions as complex due to high integration and customisation elements, others such as SP3 and SP16 saw their solutions as less complex. SP7 offers enterprise networks, data centre and mobility solutions described their solutions as complex ones:

“All the machines, devices, and software which are included in our solutions are ready-made components, but implementing these solutions require a lot of customisation and configuration, kick-off meetings, project plans, solutions are very complex and very open for integration and configuration, all kinds of technologies need to be put together to work effectively”. (SP7)

In contrast, SP3, who provides its clients complete end-to-end human capital information technology solutions and services including payroll and personnel management through web-based, mobile and cloud technology, identified their solutions as less complex:

“Our cloud-based platform is designed in a very attractive manner. The theme of this system looks like a social media design. It is easy to implement it and to integrate it with the customer’s business”. (SP3)

This introductory section has given a clear picture of the current state of the Jordanian’s ICT solution market. The next section analyses the providers’ role in increasing customer readiness to operate effectively and co-create value in the Jordanian ICT sector.

5.3 RQ1: What influence, if any, does low customer readiness in solutions markets have on the role of the provider in the solutions value co-creation process?

5.3.1 Market Development

Extant solutions frameworks (e.g., Petri and Jacob, 2016) suggest that the value co-creation phases begin when the customer defines a clear picture of the solution objective and its specific need. In contrast, customers and providers interviewed indicated that the solutions process in the Jordanian ICT solutions market begins when suppliers undertake market development activities to increase customer readiness to operate effectively within a solutions market. The need for the market development process is because customers may not be able to recognise their problems and needs that prompt them to engage with external solution providers due to high information asymmetry embedded in technology-based solutions, their lack of awareness of the value of intangible software solutions and tight budgets allocated to this type of solution. When asked whether he agrees with the current solutions value co-creation framework (see Figure 2.4), the project manager of C4 drew on his experience in the Jordanian and regional market and stated:

“I agree with this model in international markets. However, drawing on my experience in running various projects in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and specifically Jordan, our problem is here [pointed at the requirements definition phase], that customers do not always know their needs and what is worse than that they do not necessarily know if they have a problem or challenge in their systems or their business process. The second problem is decision-makers think that if they want to think about these solutions, it would cost them additional budget and huge investment. They do not know that they can find solutions at lower costs such as cloud and standardised solutions. I think suppliers should be more proactive in their solutions business approach”. (C4)

While agreeing with the current solutions process defined in previous literature, C4 as the above quote shows expressed his concerns about the readiness of the Jordanian business customers at the problem and need definition phase (see Figure 2.4). According to him, Jordanian customers may not necessarily be able to determine their needs and problems that prompt them to approach their solutions providers. Particularly, lack of the knowledge of the value of technology based solutions, lack of customer expertise in buying technology based solutions and the fear of the need to invest a considerable amount of financial resources to acquire such solutions were referred as major reasons of why customers in Jordan may lack solutions readiness. In his opinion, adopting a proactive solutions approach where providers lead the solution process and develop the technology solution market is important to succeed in solutions business.

SP8 had formerly worked around the world with Microsoft and now runs a company that offers software banking solutions in Jordan and the Middle East. When asked the same question about his view of the current solution process originated in developed markets, he commented:

“Customers are much more professional in developed countries, they are much more aware of their needs and their interactions. They know exactly what they want, much smarter in understanding their needs. Also, I believe the sales process they run we call request for proposal (RFP) is very sophisticated”. (SP8)

The above statement strongly resonates with the view offered by C4 earlier which highlights Jordanian customers’ limitations at the problem and need definition. SP8

was particularly critical of customers' proficiency at drafting their requirements when writing a request for proposal (RFP) document to potential suppliers when buying certain solutions. Taken together, these quotes suggest that providers need to invest heavily in their resources (money, time and efforts) while performing their role in the co-creation to develop the Jordanian technology-based solutions market and increase customer readiness to operate within this market. The data identified that providers adopt two main activities to develop the Jordanian ICT solution market; customer education and value demonstration. These activities are of particular importance to increase customer readiness at the early phase of solutions value co-creation. These activities are presented next.

5.3.1.1 Customer Education

Given that Jordanian business customers lacked expertise to define their needs and problems and awareness of the importance of such solutions, solutions providers in such LCRMs draw on their expert knowledge and provide customers with the knowledge [operant resource] and expertise that they need to guide their decision and increase their readiness to operate within ICT sector solutions markets. The chief executive officer of SP1 gives an example of why customer education is important to increase customer readiness to operate within a solutions market:

“One of our large clients is XXX corporation [hyper market business]. The first time we approached them, we discovered that they were running their business in an old fashion. They lacked best practices in terms of the business cycles such as employees' attendance monitoring, how they order and issue their sales invoices. One of their problems we discovered was that the way they manage their orders and supply chain. They did not have a proper understanding or clear procedures how to manage their orders and items consumption. Eventually, we told them that what they were doing was poor practice and we taught them how their orders and supply chain should be managed by introducing them to our Supply Chain Management Software. This is how we understand the solution in our market, we should approach customers and help them to realise their problems” (SP1).

The example offered by SP1 above shows that technology-based solutions buyers may not necessarily be cognizant of their business needs and problems before buying these solutions. As a result, educating customers about these solutions offerings becomes increasingly important and has a positive impact on their knowledge and expertise and

thus, increasing their readiness to operate within a solution market. Similarly, the projects director of SP4 emphasised the importance of providing customers with the skills and expertise (operant resources) they need before entering a solution market:

“Many customers know that there is point of sales or [must-have] software solutions. However, they do not know about the Business Intelligence (BI) software solution, so they assume that their business is going on, not knowing that their business process could be improved with BI solution. We have to approach them and educate them”. (SP4)

The above quotes suggest that customer education activity is an important role performed by solutions providers at the early phase of the solutions process. This specific role can be termed as *solutions knowledge provider* which aims at increasing customers’ operant resources (e.g., skills and knowledge) before their engagement in a solution relationship in the ICT solutions sector. The IT manager of C1 believes that the role of solutions knowledge provider is particularly important when customers do not necessarily appreciate the importance of technology based-solutions:

“..., unfortunately, technology infrastructure and telecommunication solutions are the last thing owners and top management think about when running their business and allocating budget, sometimes we don’t value IT solutions. It would be great if suppliers do more sharing [of their] experience, their market knowledge, approach and educate”. (C1)

According to C1, decision makers of customer firms in Jordan may not realise how technology solution offerings create, manage and optimise information and increase work efficiency. Hence, educating these customers appears to be necessary to provide customers with skills and knowledge that increases their operant resources and enabling them to engage in solutions transactions. However, the role of solutions knowledge provider should not be only applied in markets with low customer readiness such as Jordan. As technology-based solutions often evolve rapidly, many customers, who are inclined to buy and adopt such solutions, may not be aware about the latest high-value solutions. The managing director of SP7 specifically highlighted this point and pointed out:

“Inexperienced customers are not bad customers, sometimes the technology is updated on a daily basis, sometimes it is challenging for us as solution providers to understand it. Therefore, we understand that not all customers will be on top of the technology that is why we give them space to learn new solutions and technologies and to adapt it”. (SP7)

Interestingly, the data also revealed that the role of solutions knowledge providers is not solely performed by Jordanian suppliers but also by their business partners. In particular, Jordanian solutions providers were found to work closely with their partners by integrating their operant resources (technology experts) to develop the Jordanian ICT solutions sector. The marketing manager of SP6 illustrates how his company and their partners leverage their knowledge experts thus enabling solutions value co-creation at the market development phase:

“Our foreign partners including Cisco, Microsoft and Oracle are working closely with us to increase the awareness of the latest solutions available for customers in the Jordanian market. For any new solution, our partners and we conduct conference press and we invite media and business executives to introduce such solutions to the market. We believe that such gatherings serve as a strong platform to develop the Jordanian market”. (SP6)

5.3.1.2 Value Demonstration

The second activity that solutions providers perform when developing the Jordanian solutions market is value demonstration. Value demonstration involves providers proving what their solutions can do for their business customers (value in-use). Jordanian solutions providers and their customers reported that value demonstration complements customer education activity and guides the customer decision to purchase and invest in software solutions. While discussing the role of the solutions providers in the co-creation process, the financial manager of C8 who purchased a financial software solution stated:

“You can always hear nice words from your supplier, but they should show us how their software would look like on our screens and what the solution can do in practical terms”. (C8)

Supplier participants reported that this role is key in their industry and increase the customers' willingness to purchase a technology-based solution:

".... even in our presentation and before any agreement is signed, we do a live-demo where customers learn how this solution would help them in managing their educational materials more efficiently and how much time and money they would save". (SP2)

".... Only if they [customers] understand [what the solution can do], they would know why they need to make a decision to buy that solution". (SP11)

Accordingly, the providers' role in the value demonstration activity can be termed as *value demonstrator*. This role helps customers to understand and visualise the value-in-use obtained when buying technology-based solutions. Provider interviewees put forward two types of value that they demonstrate at the early phase of the solutions co-creation process. The first is *economic* value where solutions providers quantify the value that customers capture when buying the solution. The second, is the *functional* value, where providers focus on the performance outcomes and improvements that customers receive at the operational level when buying and using a software solution. However, using either or both types of these values depends on customers' business concerns and their value drivers. As suggested by the CEO of SP1:

"It depends on the vendor, how smart is the vendor in presenting his case that this solution is important to have, we have to understand where the customer is suffering and tailor our solutions into their pains".

SP7 who offers network and security-based technology solutions, argued that using the functional approach towards information security is more relevant when approaching and communicating the value of their solutions to large customer banks:

"We position our solution through educating our clients about the importance of information security and cyber-crime. We know how much information is important and sensitive to large enterprise such as XXX, and YYY companies. We go to these clients and simply tell them; we know that you have all technologies in place, but we ask them are you sure that you are totally secure and cannot be hacked? These issues motive

them to think seriously about a latent problem they have in their network security” (SP7).

In contrast, the General Manager of SP8 whose company provides core banking software solutions to banks and financial institutions felt that demonstrating the economic value is more appealing to his customers:

“Another issue that works very well for us is if you provide a solution that can save the customer money, or what we call the Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) represented by opex and capex that they need to pay when buying and maintaining our solutions. A lot of the times we actually put calculations for the customer on how before our solutions, what are the losses they are doing, and we actually ask them for numbers, we ask them how much you spend on this and this, and we come up with a formula of how much money he is losing. If he implements this solution, how much he would be saving, and that saving better be more than the price of the solution. So eventually, this increment is what makes them decide to buy a solution”. (SP8).

On the other hand, most suppliers’ participants explicitly referred to the significant role of the pre-sales team in developing the Jordanian ICT solutions market. Specifically, the pre-sale teams enable more successful value co-creation with their business customers through providing relevant knowledge and skills that increase customers’ operant resources. A pre-sale manager whose team is responsible for providing technical solutions to new and existing corporate customers said:

“We have discovered that all the value that is captured by our business is coming from the pre-sale team. We find that our technical guys are implementers and they do not know how to talk business with the customer. Also, we find the sales team cannot talk technical with the customer; they cannot get the right requirements. However, we believe that having a strong pre-sales team is fundamental to succeed in our solutions business model. The pre-sale team focuses on running awareness and educational sessions to introduce customers to new solutions and help them in defining their requirements”. (SP6)

In addition, the pre-sale teams ensure coherent coordination and organisation of solutions providers’ resources and align them with customers’ requirements. The general manager in a software company commented:

“We need a very strong presale team who can do demos and proof of concepts. Subsequently the pre-sale team offers advice to our research and development (R&D) for prospective products that are aligned with customers’ requirements”. (SP8)

In summary, the two activities discussed above, customer education and value demonstration, performed by the solutions providers in this LCRM aim at increasing customers’ knowledge (operant resource) and shifting their focus towards the value-in-use. This was found to increase customer willingness and readiness to operate within the solutions market at an early phase of solutions value co-creation in LCRM.

5.3.2 Requirements definition

As defined in the previous literature, Jordanian customers and providers agreed that this phase involves scoping solutions requirements and sharing relevant information to choose the optimal customer solution. Customers opinions differed as to whether their resources such as information on their solution goals, estimated budget, timeframe and infrastructure were ready to be shared and integrated with their solutions providers at the joint requirements definition phase. When asked about the buyer role at this phase, the project manager of C13 stated:

“I should know myself and what I want, of course I might not know exactly what I need but at least I must have a direction of where our business is going after two years. This direction might change after interviewing suppliers and exposing to other experiences. Subsequently, I will realise that the first solutions requirements I considered were not the right ones. Also, the buyer must prepare the way of payment and the money should be ready otherwise I will be unable to buy the equipment the supplier recommends, causing project delays”. (C13)

Another customer interviewee, when asked whether they performed their role effectively in the co-creation at this phase, said:

“Sometimes we do not have all tools which will help suppliers in making their efforts in developing and implementing his projects. For example, when we implemented our ERP software, we did not have a qualified hardware to fit with their solution”. (C2)

However, discussions with suppliers indicated that the joint requirement definition phase is the most difficult process in solutions exchange. Concerns were expressed by many interviewees from supplier companies about customers' readiness and ability to plan and organise their resources effectively at the joint requirements definition. For instance, the CEO of a supplier firm was concerned about customers' ability to scope their solutions requirements:

"In Arabian markets generally and in Jordan specifically, customers frequently are unable to differentiate between what they need and what they want, so now you sit down with customer firm representatives and they tell you I need a system which does 1 2 3...but when we dig deeply into his business process we realise that they do not need 123 but they need A, B and C". (SP1)

Others, however, were concerned about customers' ability to offer enough information and guidance about their internal systems and processes:

"Usually, any project will have a requirement from the customer side and our side; we tell them what we need such as IPs and a lot of other technical things. However, in Jordan, customers are unable to provide us with what we need due to the lack of expertise. As a result, we will do our part as well as theirs on their behalf. This affects the project plan and slows down the process..." (SP7).

The presales manager of SP6 was concerned about customers' financial resources for the solution:

"The biggest challenge for us is to have the customer clear about their budget. Without a clear budget, we cannot find a proper solution configuration that suits customer ability to pay. Therefore, we help many customers in setting their solutions budgets and instalments payment". (SP6)

Another supplier interviewee raised the point of customers' limitation in writing their request for proposal documents (RFP):

"We face some customers that would be convinced to buy a business intelligence software solution, but they do not document what they need. Therefore, we believe that our role is to direct these customers to document their requirements and write proper RFPs". (SP9)

Therefore, the previous quotes suggest that Jordanian solutions providers' role at the joint requirements definition stage is to help customers to organise and manage their resources. This role includes various tasks and procedures including scoping customers' requirements, helping them plan their solutions budgets effectively and directing them in writing a proper RFP. This role, performed by solution providers, can be termed as "*customer resources organiser*". It allows solutions providers to influence the customer's process in a way that customers become able to utilise their own resources and processes more effectively and efficiently. This role is particularly needed when customers have limited experience in high tech solution offerings such as these originated in technology-based solutions. For example, when they purchased an ERP software solution, customer 3 acknowledged that they made the wrong decision by requesting unneeded features at that time:

"We thought it would be great if we have all of the solution features. However, we were not yet ready to use all the functions, we were supposed to buy only the warehouse module, and we were disappointed". (C3)

The IT manager of C1 also welcomed this role, admitting their limitation in setting the right business requirements:

"I like to see the vendor telling me, for example, I have worked with this pharmaceutical chain and they do things in a certain way, why don't you do it like this? That opens our eyes, and then I realise that the first set of specifications we had in mind were not right". (C1)

5.3.3 Solutions deployment and post-deployment

Solutions deployment in the ICT sector refers to the process of delivering and installing the solutions into customers' business processes. Both Jordanian buyers and suppliers' participants emphasised that Jordanian customers may not be able to utilise the solution value-in-use originated in technology-based solutions effectively without suppliers' support. The pre-sale manager of SP5 expressed his concern about this issue:

“The most important thing is who is going to receive the solution after execution, what always scares us is how this service solution will be managed and used by the customers, sometimes we find customers who are unable to run the telecom solution on their network efficiently”. (SP5)

Interview data with customer and supplier firms identified two reasons that may hamper customers from utilising the optimum value in-use. C13 purchased a digitised document management system and attributed this to lack of expertise to the new system:

“We were not an expert in the solution system. We needed them [the supplier] to stay with us step by step after it was put into service. Otherwise we could have ruined everything”. (C13)

Similarly, C8 acknowledged that they thought their financial software capability was limited to certain financial reports. However, they realised that the solution’s capability goes beyond these reports:

“I think there is a difference between using software and utilising value, using it does not mean that we are making the most of it. For instance, in the first phase after implementation, we thought that we had issued all possible financial reports from the software. However, they [the provider] told us that we still can issue significant reports that we did not think about. Their continuous support while using their solution was necessary”. (C8)

The other reason that may hinder Jordanian customers to utilise solution value in-use is the negative assumptions and beliefs held by customer users towards technology-based solutions. When asked how they experienced the implementation and post-deployment process, the general manager of C2 stated:

“It took us too much time to get the software completely adopted. Users may not adopt the software because either they might think it is difficult to use, add new tasks to them or replace them”. (C2)

A sales account manager of a supplier firm echoes the preceding statement and asserted:

“We often have problems with customer users at the implementation phase where staff are used to an old fashion in performing their tasks. These people tend to resist change and I believe this is a negative phenomenon as it affects the customers’ ability to obtain the maximum value of the software”. (SP17)

While aiming to unravel how Jordanian suppliers attempted to cope with customers’ inability to utilise and adopt value in-use effectively, it appeared many suppliers adopted the role of “*value in-use enabler*”. This role refers to a set of techniques and activities that are undertaken by Jordanian solutions providers to increase customer users’ adoption and effectively utilising value in-use. For instance, enabling the value-in-use role necessitates that suppliers develop and implement a user-friendly technology-based solution. While achieving this aim appeared to be easy for SP3 and SP16 due to their reliance on simple technologies such as cloud solutions, the pre-sales manager of SP5 pointed out that implementing an easy solution is not an easy task:

“The most difficult challenge I face with my team is always how to find an easy solution that customers will find easy to use and adopt”. (SP5)

Another customer participant welcomed the providers’ role of value in-use enabler and highlighted that suppliers need to convince users to adopt a solution by highlighting the strategic value of the new software:

“The supplier role is to teach users that the solution is going to make their life easy and facilitate their tasks not to replace them”. (C13)

The preceding quote indicates that ensuring close communication between solutions providers and their customers is critical to increase technology-based solutions adoption. In addition, it implies that reducing uncertainties is vital to increase users’ willingness to adopt software and, thus, utilise value in-use. A solutions development

manager of a supplier firm agrees with the previous quote and highlights the importance of training programmes and sharing successful stories:

“The provider first has to create awareness of the automation process and how this will make life easy for employees, save time. Also, it is important to present and share how developed countries and international organisations benefited from technology-based solutions. I also believe that scheduling training and providing a proper support enables the adoption process”. (SP11)

This view was echoed by another customer informant who believes that sharing such real stories can increase adoption of provider offerings by Jordanian customers:

“We keep telling our staff that the company, Nokia, had no problems within their business until they lagged behind in the market. However, Nokia did not improve their business and, therefore, stayed behind. From here, we educate our users that even though our business is running well and yielding profits, if we do not develop our company by adapting new solutions, there will be a time where other companies will become more successful than us”. (C4)

However, one supplier participant was particularly critical about how solutions vendors can overcome lack of customer adoption by suggesting that customers may need to hire a change management consulting company to enable a smooth business transformation:

“Change management is very important to be adopted by customers and their top management whether they are SMEs or large enterprise. The change management programme can be either run by solutions vendors themselves or by independent companies that are specialised in this business. This approach is useful because it offers a systematic process that includes awareness sessions, training programmes on how a particular solution will serve you as a user and make your life easier than before”. (SP2)

In all cases, the previous quotes demonstrate that solutions providers can increase customer readiness and willingness to adopt solutions offerings at the deployment and post-deployment phase by adopting the role of value in-use enabler. This role included

various activities and techniques such as ensuring implementing an easy solution, investing heavily in training programmes, and reducing uncertainties perceived by users involved with buying technology-based solutions.

In summary, this section presented and analysed how solutions providers increase customer readiness to operate within technology-based solutions markets. The previous analysis generated four distinct, but complementary roles performed by the Jordanian suppliers to support customers' limitations that may hinder them from performing their roles in the co-creation process. These roles are: solution knowledge provider, value demonstrator, customer resources organiser and value in-use enabler respectively. Table 5.1 summarises these roles and present their importance in increasing customer readiness in the Jordanian ICT sector.

Table 5.1: *Providers' roles to increase customer readiness to operate and co-create value within the Jordanian ICT solution market as emerged from analysis*

Value co-creation phases of customer solution	Proposed roles adopted by solutions providers	Impact of performed role on customers' resources and processes during the co-creation process
Market Development	Solution knowledge provider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increases customers' knowledge and skills about technology-based solutions. - Identifying the areas where customers may have problems or can improve their business process. - Increases customers' willingness to buy and engage with a solution provider.
	Value demonstrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shifting the customer focus from value-in-exchange approach (e.g., solution price) to performance outcomes. - Demonstrating the functional and economic value of the solution.
Requirements Definition	Customer resources organiser	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scoping and defining customers' specific requirements. - Helping and directing customers at writing an RFP document. - Helping customers to plan their solutions budget effectively.

Deployment and Post-deployment	Value in-use enabler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensuring customers adopt the solution into their business process. - Ensuring that customers utilise solution value in-use effectively.
--------------------------------	----------------------	--

As the above table shows, the four identified roles were found to be performed by solutions providers over various phases of the customer solutions process. Through performing these roles, solutions providers in Jordan aimed at increasing customer readiness to effectively operate and co-create value within the ICT solutions market. Having answered the first research question through analysing relevant data, the next section presents the research findings of the second research question.

5.4 RQ2: How does adopting a multiple solution value proposition approach influence value communication and the co-creation activity?

Previous solutions marketing research depicts a homogenous solutions value proposition without addressing offering multiple value propositions and its influence on co-creation activities. Solutions providers in the ICT sector were found to offer two types of customer solution value propositions to different types of business customers in their local and global markets. It was evident from the data that marketing and communicating these forms of value propositions implies that solutions providers need to adopt different solutions selling approaches due to different customer needs and drivers for these solutions. These two forms of customer solutions value propositions can be classified as a transactional type of customer solution value proposition and strategic type.

5.4.1 Strategic type of customer value proposition associated with offering on-premise solutions (owned by the customer)

The strategic type of customer solutions value propositions in the ICT sector was associated with offering large, complex and on-premise technology-based solutions offerings. These offerings entail servers that are privately owned and controlled by the customer. An example of suppliers who offer this type of solutions are: SP6, SP7 and SP11. Supplier interviewees reported that this type of offering is characterised by high

complexity due to high technical integration between different types of technologies. This type of solution was communicated to large customers that are concerned with having a high level of data security and require high server capacity:

“Large enterprise such as XXX company tend to demand physical infrastructure and prefer to have their own network servers. Due to the large number of users and their complex requirements, this type of solution suits them more”. (SP11)

Because of the complexity involved in this type of offering and customers’ sophisticated needs when buying such an offering, communicating this type of solution value proposition necessitates providers to adopt a strategic solutions selling approach where sales teams have high competencies and market knowledge. In the words of a sales director:

“Selling big solutions to large customers requires different language and more advanced and functional sales competences. Those customers are keener to learn how solutions will improve their business processes, reducing their costs and improving the quality of services provided to their clients. We have to keep an eye on their return on investment (ROI) and their total cost of ownership (TCO)”. (SP6).

The above quote also implies that the strategic solution selling approach focuses on outcome-based contracting (value in-use). In addition, developing and delivering this type of solution involves extensive customer-provider interaction, in which intense resources contributed by both parties including monetary and non-monetary resources (e.g., time and efforts) are integrated during the co-creation. A solutions development manager whose company offers on-premise installed solutions depicts the resource integration process linked with this type of customer solution value proposition:

“The contract size of heavy installed solutions is usually big and, therefore, we need to invest more time and effort with the client to learn their business and scope their requirements. In addition, more detailed and in-depth information is shared between us and large individual customers. Also, large teams from us and them are needed when we do the implementation which could last a long time before the customer starts adopting these solutions”. (SP11)

The preceding quote also highlights the richness of information shared between both parties during the co-creation phases when communicating a strategic customer solution value proposition.

5.4.2 Transactional type of customer value proposition associated with offering cloud based-solutions (pay-per-use)

In addition to the strategic value propositions communicated to large customers associated with complex solutions offerings, most supplier participants were found to also adopt a transactional value propositions approach when communicating the value of their offerings to smaller customers. This type of customer solution value proposition was largely linked with offering cloud-based technology solutions. Unlike on-premise installed solutions highlighted earlier, this form of solutions offering was created for smaller customers that do not need to invest heavily in solutions infrastructure. Hence, customers do not have their own physical servers and, therefore, customers are only charged for their solution use. Providers (e.g., SP3, SP6 and SP10) called this type of solutions in the ICT sector “*solution as a service*” or “*pay-per-use*” where customers have more control over their financial resources. C4, one of the smallest customer firms interviewed, justify why solutions providers operating in the ICT solutions sector need to develop a specific solutions offering that matches with organisations such as theirs:

“Customer firms like us cannot invest heavily in customisation and infrastructure and they need something practical to help them to run their business with high technology optimisation”. (C4)

The empirical data highlighted that smaller customers were not attracted and willing to invest in the same type of solutions offered to large customer firms due to their size, their needs for these solutions and their financial limitations. The sales director of SP6 emphasised the importance of creating and communicating a specific solution offering that matches the need of smaller business customers:

“Why do I need to tell small and start-ups customers I cannot help you? “Today, the need of smaller customers is completely different than large ones. For example, a small company of 50 employees might be interested in full cloud solutions. This type of service solution is more attractive to them instead of buying their own server, which will cost them a fortune. In cloud solutions, customers pay per use and thus capex and

opex is absolutely zero... we see cloud solutions as a promising business model for smaller customers due to their size and basic need of the technology”. (SP6)

The considerable emphasis on adopting multiple solutions value proposition to match the need of both smaller and large customers in the ICT sector urged the researcher to conduct another follow-up interview to learn how such an approach has an impact on communicating solutions value propositions and its implication on co-creation activities. This follow-up interview was conducted with the sales director of SP6 as this particular company is one of the leading firms which adopted offering multiple value propositions in the Jordanian ICT sector. This interview generated rich insights of how both value propositions (e.g., transactional and strategic) dictate different practical mechanisms with regard value co-creation activities in terms of the selling approaches and resources integrated between the two parties. Unlike providers’ emphasis on long term solutions outcomes associated with communicating the strategic value proposition (e.g., on-premise and complex solutions), the sales director of SP6 stressed that following a transactional selling approach is more appropriate when communicating customer value propositions related to cloud-based solutions offerings. This is because these types of solutions are mainly purchased by smaller customers whose need for IT solutions is minimal and, thus, they are largely driven by price and cost reduction. More importantly, the transactional selling approach implies that the role of sales people is less dynamic and their competencies are basic and bounded to the simple solutions they communicate to their customers.

“Smaller customers usually think investing in IT is not worth it and extra cost. They only need to cover their basic needs. Such customers do not talk about BI [Business Intelligence], Analytic, Big Data and Virtualisation. Therefore, adopting traditional selling approach where salespeople have basic competences is more appropriate to this type of customers”. (Sales Director, SP6)

In contrast to the high intensity degree of co-creation activities when offering on-premise and installed solutions, providers noted that communicating the customer value proposition related to cloud-based solutions offerings is characterised with low intense co-creation activities. This means that provider and customer resources and processes integrated during the co-creation are likely to be minimal. This is because

such solutions are perceived as simple offerings compared to large and complex solutions where customers tend to have their equipment installed on their premises. Also, cloud based-solutions can be easily implemented and adopted among smaller customer firms. A marketing manager of a supplier firm whose company offers cloud-based human resources management solutions packages stated:

“cloud solutions are easily integrated and implemented into customers’ business, they do not require prior big know-how, which helps the customer to learn and adapt such solutions easily”. (SP3)

Moreover, data indicated that adopting a multiple solutions value proposition approach requires providers to plan and organise their resources effectively to succeed in solutions selling. For example, supplier interviewees reported that the number of smaller customers is significantly higher than large and key customers in all markets they cover. Therefore, providers stated that their sales teams dedicated to smaller customers are bigger than salesforce dedicated to large customers as smaller customers require such a big reach in their local and regional markets.

In summary, the empirical evidence showed that providers in the ICT sector need to adopt a dynamic view of the customer solutions value proposition perspective. This view necessitates providers to combine both identified approaches (e.g., transactional and strategic) when communicating the value of their solution offerings, depending on the customers’ needs to these solutions and their usage-context.

5.5 RQ3: How does an Arabian business culture impact the solutions value co-creation process?

The third chapter highlighted that most solutions marketing research is focused on western contexts and, therefore, the impact of cultural issues on solutions value co-creation process has not been highlighted. The interview data indicated that the Arabian business culture has an impact on the solutions value co-creation process. The general manager of SP8 draws on his experience in the international market and illustrates why solutions models developed in a western context may not be universal to other business cultural contexts such as the Arabian world:

“In Jordan and in the Middle East as whole, unprofessionalism can be very challenging”. Basically, people in Jordan sell based on “I know this person”, and relationships, versus the solution itself so there is a lot more cultural elements in the way they sell versus following a professional process that you know, is very clear, transparant. In developed countriens, you know that if you score this much here and you score this much there in the [solution] process you will get the deal. I sold with Microsoft worldwide and this is not specific to Jordan. Each country has its own cultural factors that affect the sales process. I found developed countries like Western Europe and the US the most sophisticated and least culturally impacted because they a have scientific process in the way they make decisions”. (SP8)

The above quote highlights the difference between buying and marketing solutions in western contexts and other contexts such as the Arabian world. It also illustrates the role of personal connections as a cultural element in in the process of buying and selling solutions in Jordan. The next subsections present the major themes emerging from the data which explain the impact of Arabian culture on the solutions value co-creation process.

5.5.1 The influence of (Wasta) and interpersonal connections

Interviews with Jordanian customer and provider firms reported that personal relationships primarily shape the early co-creation process exemplified by the signalling phase and pre-solutions agreements (see Figure 2.4). The influence of personal relationships among suppliers and customers appeared to influence the customer solution process at the early phase in two ways. First, there are examples where it seems personal relationships influence how Jordanian customer firms decide on their solutions providers. Extant western solutions marketing literature demonstrates that customers evaluate various potential suppliers before choosing a solutions provider. The supplier who wins the deal is the one who demonstrates its competency and shows its commitment to develop and implement effective customer solutions (Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011). In striking contrast, rather than focusing on the performance outcomes from solutions offerings (value-in-use) when choosing the best supplier, a number of solutions providers noted that Jordanian customers may not follow the western approach and choose their solutions providers based on how close that supplier (*wasta*) is to the decision-maker of the customer firm. The same general manager of a supplier firm,

who highlighted the impact of Arabian business culture on the customer solution process earlier, reported:

“Here in Jordan you can be like the highest and best solution offering but because someone has got a call, you can lose the deal as a vendor at the last minute. Hence, the sophistication of the buying process sometimes is very challenging”. (SP8)

The above quote suggests that decision-makers of Jordanian customer firms may not necessarily follow a transparent buying process by considering *wasta* as a decisive factor when choosing their solutions providers. The pattern of customer reliance on *wasta* connections when choosing a certain supplier was also raised by the solutions providers SP1 and SP10. This recurring pattern associated with customers’ reliance on *wasta* when deciding on a solution provider urged the researcher to understand how Jordanian business customers choose their solution provider. Interestingly, customer firms offered various answers about the influence of *wasta* connections on their supplier selection process. For instance, at 4200 employees, a human resource system manager of C7, disagreed with solutions providers SP8, SP1 and SP10 and described her company’s solution buying process as a transparent process:

“.... Usually our policy posits that we need at least three suppliers, if all [suppliers] offer us the same features we go with the lowest cost, we ask all our purchasing committee to disclose if they have any personal connection with any supplier to exclude [personal connections influencing decision making] it”. (C7)

The preceding quote implies that this participant regards the use of a *wasta* person as a major decisive factor when choosing supplier firm is an unacceptable and unprofessional practice. Similarly, the IT manager of a large customer firm, who was one of the buying members when they purchased their software banking solution, confirmed the previous quote and stated:

“We form a purchasing committee, then we invite many potential suppliers to do presentation and awareness sessions, [...]so we have the state-of-the-art of purchasing committee, we have more than one buying process and our procedures mandate using all of these committees to guarantee the credibility and transparency of the buying process, ultimately we sign with the best provider”. (C9)

However, while the above statements, reported by C9 and C7, denied using *wasta* connections and expressed a very transparent procurement process when choosing a solutions provider, the IT manager of C3 admitted that their general manager chose a friend's supplier firm for their IP cameras security solution:

"[...] we [the IT department] were asked to follow and coordinate with a certain supplier who was obviously a close friend of our general manager. However, we were not involved in choosing and evaluating other suppliers' offerings for this solution". (C3)

Customers' point of view on the influence of *wasta* on their decision of supplier selection suggest that although some customers may still rely on their close friends when deciding on suppliers, it appears there is a growing trend that Jordanian customers tend to rely less on *wasta* as a decisive factor when choosing their solution providers.

The second important issue associated with the influence of interpersonal connections at the early co-creation process is providers' need to develop strong personal relationships with customer firms which precedes value co-creation initiation. Empirical data from this Arabian market showed that providers' operant resources, including market knowledge and competency, may not necessarily be sufficient to give them access to customer firms' resources and initiate solutions relationships (value co-creation). In this Arabian market, solution providers argued that developing strong personal relationships with customer contacts is a key to initiating solutions value co-creation. A corporate sales manager of a supplier firm was particularly critical of the use of personal connections and argued that having strong personal relationships with customer firm serves as an enabler of solutions value co-creation:

"[...] even at the meeting levels, to reach to top management, sometimes we need to use our connections because you have to talk to two or three connected persons only to arrange for a meeting". (SP10)

This quote suggests that developing strong personal relationships with Jordanian customer firms is vital to generate sales leads that can be turned into a solutions relationship. Such personal connections with customers serve as an important operant resource

developed by Jordanian solution providers to enable them to engage with their customers and, thus, initiate value co-creation.

5.5.2 *Jordanian buyers' treatment of time*

A key finding from the interviews was the extreme lack of urgency of Jordanian business buyers of solutions agreements. The interviewed suppliers indicated that Jordanian buyers take an excessive amount of time before they close a solution deal at the initial phase of the solution process. The business development manager of SP15 explicitly addressed this point:

"....Some clients requested pilots two years ago. They pick up the phone and ask you for something if you do this order today, we are going to close with you at the end of this week. We went there, and our sales director joined us for that meeting. We conducted a workshop at the client premises and we met all of their requirements and they were extremely happy. Now we have been waiting for their official letter to complete the sales cycle. Believe it or not, for one year so far, they have not returned to us by a phone call or email or visit, they suddenly turned silent. Imagine how difficult is this market, the client keeps you busy, you go and come back, go and come back again, you do not know when this thing is going to be completed". (SP15)

Interviews with customer and supplier firms identified various reasons that contribute to the slow pace followed by Jordanian customer firms prior to closing any solution agreement. Large customer firms, particularly, who purchased complex and large solutions took excessive amounts of time before closing a solution deal due to the long authority matrix followed and lack of clarity on their operant resources (e.g., solutions goals and budget) that needed to initiate a solution co-creation relationship. A human resources systems manager of a customer justified why their company took a very long time before closing a solution deal:

"It is very long cycle. Internally it is easy to decide we need this solution and we are going to buy but it takes a very long time to make it happen and close a deal. In our company particularly, we keep reviewing and changing our minds of the direction of the project. It is also a cycle of approvals and it is a long managerial process with an authority matrix. It also depends on the budget and we need to ensure that the real need and value of the solution is established". (C7)

Provider firms also added that the political volatility that surrounds Jordan alongside customers' emphasis on short-term value (solution price) influence Jordanian customers' urgency to close a solution deal. A corporate sales manager highlighted:

"I think the political instability in the region and customer purchasing power influence how Jordanian buyers behave. Take this example, in Gulf countries, they focus on solutions quality, if you meet what the customer needs, they will sign, and they do not have time to initiate a useless negotiation. In contrast, our buyers in Jordan act in a very smart way; they are not in a hurry to finish any solution deal. They keep pressing for price reductions and procrastinate for no reasons; it's the nature of people, we go sometimes once, twice and three times to follow up and see where they [customers] stand now". (SP10)

Interestingly, the above quote acknowledges that use of time by Jordanian buyers while negotiating solutions agreements may be different than other Arabian countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). While Jordanian buyers tend to largely emphasise value-in-exchange (solution price) due to their limited financial resources, other business customers in Arabian markets such as the UAE may emphasise the solution value-in-use. Such a difference may affect how the time is spent between customers in these countries before closing a solution deal. It appears that Jordanian buyers use their tight budgets and political volatility in the region as driver to increase their bargaining power and negotiate heavily to obtain a better solution deal. Hence, Jordanian customers tend to perceive the time as a powerful resource that enables them to negotiate with more than one provider at once and press further for price reductions.

Overall, the pattern associated with customers' lack of urgency of solution agreement suggests that Jordanian solution providers need to be patient to cope with the slow pace of solutions deal closure and manage the time required for negotiation with their solutions customers. Hence, drawing on the analysis associated with the impact of Arabian business culture on the customer solutions process in the previous section (see 5.5.1) and this section, it can be suggested that developing strong personal relationships with customer firms and managing the time required during solution negotiation are important solutions sales capabilities which Jordanian solutions providers need to develop to enable them to initiate solutions value co-creation.

5.5.3 *Involvement of top management of supplier firms*

The findings also highlighted an important strategic selling approach which can be followed by Jordanian solutions providers to increase the possibility of winning a solution deal. Particularly, the findings suggest that involving chief executive officers (CEOs) of supplier firms when selling customer solutions to key customer accounts is an important procedure that enhances providers' ability to win a solution deal and thus initiate a solution co-creation relationship. In particular, the involvement of top management teams of supplier firms appears to facilitate developing strong personal relationships with customer firms and prompt them to sign solutions agreements. While talking about how they selected their telecoms solution provider, the marketing manager of C10 specifically highlights how involvement of the CEOs level of their solution provider at the negotiation phase was pivotal in awarding them the deal:

“Our final decision on deciding on the supplier hinged on XXX and YYY suppliers and both of them were leaders in the Jordanian telecom sector and also they were equal in terms of fulfilling our needs. XXX supplier were aiming to close the deal through their account manager and his direct manager. We did not feel that our business was important enough for them. However, the entire CEOs level of YYY [their chosen supplier] came to close the deal. Our top management felt that we are being dealt with extreme importance and appreciation”. (C10)

This quote implies that the involvement of top executives is perceived by Jordanian customers (e.g., C1 and C10) as a sign of respect and sense of relief that their business is in safe hands. Therefore, such an approach can be a major factor for some customers to award a particular supplier a solution deal.

5.6 **RQ4: What provider and customer practices lead to destroying value co-creation experiences in solutions exchange?**

The second chapter highlighted that, despite the fact that value co-destruction and value co-creation can happen concurrently (section 2.2.5), solutions marketing research remains largely within the domain of the co-creation spectrum, demonstrating positive co-creation experiences perceived by the customer and the supplier. Hence, the fourth research question was formulated to determine providers' and customers'

practices that lead to a suboptimal value co-creation experience. Accordingly, during interview procedures, customers and their solutions providers were strongly urged to discuss and reveal how they perceive each other's behaviours and interactions that contribute to negative value co-creation experiences.

Previous literature on value co-destruction research has pointed out that suboptimal value may occur as a consequence of resource deficiencies in or resources misuse by one or more parties involved in the co-creation process (Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010; Vafeas, Hughes and Hilton, 2016). Findings from the solutions context in the ICT sector strongly confirm previous theoretical conceptualisation of how suboptimal value emerges but also identify some culturally-driven practices associated with Arabian business culture. Both Jordanian customers and providers articulated several practices that may impede achieving a positive value co-creation experience within a technology-based solutions context. Customers' and providers' practices that lead to negative value co-creation experiences are presented below.

5.6.1 Customers' reliance on *wasta* practice when choosing suppliers

Section 5.5.1 earlier showed that some Jordanian customers may still use *wasta* practice which is associated with choosing their close friends when deciding on solution providers. However, this practice was found to result in failed interaction perceived by solution providers and may also lead to suboptimal value experienced by customers who adopt *wasta*. From the provider's view, if the customer does not follow a transparent purchasing process and awards a solution deal to a close friend (*wasta*) over considering other factors such as suppliers' experience and competency, this behaviour will impede other competing suppliers from initiating a value co-creation at the early phase of the customer solution process. The general manager of SP1 gives an example of how customers' use of *wasta* when choosing their suppliers led to failed interaction perceived by suppliers:

"I am not shy to admit that we have gone through a long and sad story with one of the biggest companies here in Jordan who needed a gas stations management system solution. This company called for bidding inviting several suppliers to pilot and asked them to actively demonstrate competencies and experiences. We were among those suppliers and we certainly were the only company that fulfilled all their requirements. However, we were shocked afterward later to realise that they had chosen X supplier in their mind before even they had called for this bidding". (SP1)

The above quote demonstrates how customers' absence of transparency when evaluating potential suppliers resulting from *wasta* practice causes a distressing experience for the provider, thus resulting in a decline in the provider's well-being. Moreover, this practice was also found to cause a resource loss perceived by solution providers. The previous analysis revealed that solutions providers in Jordan invest heavily in their resources (e.g., time, money, and effort) while developing a technology-based solutions market to increase customer readiness to operate within this market and co-create value (section 5.3.1). However, if the customer lacks a transparent solutions buying process, this would jeopardise the provider's resources invested at initiating value co-creation during a solution negotiation. While discussing how customers' reliance on *wasta* practice when choosing their supplier affect the provider's resources, the general manager of a supplier firm pointed out:

"[....] As a vendor you can invest very heavily for nine months and lose the business, you paid out for trips and resources, for time spent and then you could get nothing, there is no guarantee that you will win the deal in the Jordanian market". (SP8)

Importantly, while the above quotes highlighted how providers perceive failed interaction during the early co-creation process, data also offered an example that customer firms that do not follow a transparent buying process by using *wasta* practice when choosing a solution provider may also perceive suboptimal value-in-use. C3, who admitted earlier (see, 5.5.1) that their supplier was chosen because that supplier is a close friend of their general manager, explicitly addresses this particular point:

"Eventually, we discovered later that this solution was not the best for our business process. We needed the same solution but with some other more technical features. This caused us a lot of disruption at the implementation phase, some features did not fit neatly with our other systems. That supplier was not the best, but he was a close friend to our general manger, so he trusted him that he will get the best but actually it was not. We certainly were not happy about that experience". (C3)

The above quote raises the point that if Jordanian businesses' customers choose their supplier based on how close that supplier is to the decision-maker of the customer

firm, this may jeopardise solutions performance outcomes (value-in-use). If a customer relies on a *wasta* connection to choose a certain solution provider, as indicated by C3 above, they are likely to miss other, better, solutions value-in-use offered by other providers. This interpretation could explain why C7 and C9, earlier (see, 5.5.1), emphasised following a very transparent supplier selection process in their solutions procurement.

C14 was interviewed recently to elaborate further on customer practice in relation to their reliance on *wasta* when choosing solutions providers. The purchasing manager offers an explanation of why he thinks that customers' reliance on *wasta* when choosing their solutions providers has become less prominent:

“Despite wasta factor seems to be still influential in the Jordanian B2B transactions, I believe that there is a growing trend among companies and purchasing managers to follow a thorough and transparent evaluation process of potential suppliers before choosing the right one. In my experience, Jordanian buyers have learned that choosing suppliers recommended by their friends and relatives without considering other alternative vendors can be displeasing”. (C14)

Therefore, it can be suggested that customers' reliance on *wasta* when deciding on the solution provider may also result in suboptimal value-in-use perceived by them. This occurs when customers realise that the offering they bought is an inferior solution and they missed other optimal solution value propositions because of their preference to the supplier who may be a friend of the decision-maker of the customer firm.

5.6.2 Unwillingness to share accurate information

In a solutions relationship, it is essential that customers share political and operational information with providers to deliver successful solutions. Surprisingly, however, a number of Jordanian provider and customer participants expressed concerns about the accuracy of information shared between both parties. First, the suppliers interviewed noted that some customers may not be accurate when providing information on their business contexts during the resource integration process. A commercial director of a telecoms solution provider explicitly addressed this point:

“Sometimes we find some customers who are dishonest about the information they provide about their businesses. Customers may be dishonest about their expectations from the solution, who their stakeholders are and who is the person in charge to sign. We may not get this directly” (SP15)

Such practice associated with customers’ unwillingness to provide exact information can cause negative value co-creation experiences as perceived by the provider and may ultimately influence solutions effectiveness. The findings suggest that when the customer is unwilling to provide accurate information, for example about their business concerns, then the provider is unable to propose various solutions options that will fulfil their business requirements. As a result, providers may not have the knowledge needed for implementing optimal solutions offerings, thus, hindering them from performing their roles in the co-creation process. The following quote by a senior development manager of a supplier firm explains the impact of receiving inaccurate information due the co-creation:

“We find huge international corporations operating in Jordan are having high standards. They are clear about what they are requesting, key performance indicators (KPIs), cost structure and the contractual relationship. In Jordan, possibly due to the culture, the client’s mentality is not necessarily like that. The customer’s objective from the solution might be hidden, sometimes the client may say that his concern is the efficiency of that solution but it turns out that his concern [is] making profits. This is a challenge and makes our role difficult in determining the project scope”. (SP2)

On the other hand, there seems to be an evidence whereby providers may sometimes not provide customers with sufficient information during and after solution implementation. While discussing a technical problem they experienced after solution implementation, the IT manager of C1 seemed sceptical about their supplier’s clarification of the software fault:

After implementation, they [Supplier] were doing an update and we had several disconnection problems in our pharmaceutical system. When we contacted them, they said the internet speed seems too slow for this software. We then upgraded the speed of our internet, but the problem was not resolved. Later, we heard that they [Supplier]

sought advice from another supplier in the market. So we also went to a specialised company in database management. We told them problems we were facing and they were able to solve and overcome them, I was then surprised that our vendor went to the same adviser as well, why were they [supplier] not clear with us when the problems arose?” (C1)

The above quote suggests that if the provider lacks clarity and fails to offer the necessary information to the customer, this will ultimately affect the extent to which the customer trusts the supplier in the solutions relationship. Collectively, the preceding quotes in relation to the possibility of sharing inaccurate information by both parties suggest that both providers and customers perceived this practice as an inappropriate behaviour that may result in negative co-creation outcomes.

5.6.3 Reluctance to adopt technology-based solutions

Previous analysis (see section 5.3.3) concluded that users of customer firms were found not to easily adopt technology-based solutions into their processes. This reluctance appeared to occur at an early phase of the co-creation and the deployment phase and could be triggered by either potential users or some of the buying centre members. Solution providers perceived this practice negatively as this causes project delays and affects customers' ability to utilise a solution's value-in-use effectively. Moreover, the findings on this indicate that customers' reluctance to adopt technology-based solutions may also lead not only to suboptimal value but failed interaction processes (value destruction). The failed interaction process may happen if any member of the buying centre (e.g., buyers or users) of a customer firm has a negative attitude towards technology-based solutions, prompting them to disregard and fight any opportunity for solution co-creation. For example, the project director of SP4 offered evidence of how customer practices may lead to value destruction:

“One of our customers needed a business intelligence software solution, the CEO of this company appointed his financial manager as a project manager of this solution. We realised after a while that this financial manager was fighting against this system, thinking that this may replace him later or limit his authorities in his organisation. Eventually, the business opportunity was ruined”. (SP4)

Therefore, in the ICT solutions market, providers may find it hard to close a deal and initiate solutions co-creation if the customer representative has a negative attitude towards such solutions. More importantly, given that individual attitudes towards adopting technology-based solutions may vary among customer users, the data suggest users of customer firms who advocate buying these solutions may also experience a failed interaction process if their work colleagues have negative attitudes towards such solutions. One of the customer interviewees, who works as a financial manager in a family run business, expressed her concerns about her top management support for technology-based solutions:

“I thought it is worth having business intelligence software solutions as it facilitates the way we run our business, and increases transparency and credibility of information. However, there was obvious resistance from top management. I told them I have an appointment with one of the solutions providers next week to discuss that solution, but apparently, no one was willing to join me in that meeting and support this opportunity. Honestly now I feel confused now to go further, even if we buy it, they may not be willing to adopt it later. This thing really frustrates me” (C5).

The above quote implies that if some of the customer representatives (e.g., users or decision-makers) show reluctance to adopt technological solutions, other people of the same firm who are willing to adopt such solutions will experience value destruction. This value destruction is perceived by customer representatives, who call for a solution to be developed and implemented, when they realise that other, more influential, people in their firm resist initiating a solution relationship with the provider. The call made by the financial manager, above, to buy the software solution was neglected, thus impeding her to initiate a solution relationship and utilise solution value-in-use. This result suggests that causes and practices that lead to negative value co-creation experiences in ICT can be perceived differently among different members involved in buying a customer solution.

In order to overcome customers’ and users’ reluctance to adopt technological solutions, providers and customers emphasised the importance of developing this solution market by creating awareness of the automation process and demonstrating solution value effectively. Overall, this appears to be consistent with the provider’s roles (e.g., customer education and value-in-use enabler) proposed earlier in this chapter (see, Table 5.1).

5.6.4 *Lack of operant resources (knowledge and skills)*

Negative co-creation outcomes can also occur when the customer lacks knowledge and expertise pertinent to solution offerings. In solutions originated in the ICT sector, customers may not necessarily have prior expertise in buying certain solutions leaving them unable to define a clear scope and solution objective. Solutions providers argued that customers' lack of operant resources (knowledge and skills) at the early phase of the co-creation can lead to negative co-creation outcomes as such customers may underestimate providers' expert knowledge. In the words of a business development manager:

"I believe that it is important when you hire a supplier to trust their expertise and advice. However, sometimes we fight with the customers when dealing with their requirements. The challenge is some customers do not have experience in the solution needed and insist to have many features even if they do not need them all. When we tell them that you do not need all of that, you need only this and this, they start fighting with us and thinking that we cannot fulfil their requirements. You feel customers may not always trust our advice". (SP2)

The above quote demonstrates that, also, absence of operant resources may influence the level of trust between the customer and provider. As a result, such customers may not be willing to change their requirements and expectations according to the operational counselling provided by their solutions providers. The business development manager of SP13 gave an example:

"We frequently encounter that some customers want our software to run in a certain manner. However, we tell them that the solution should be run in this manner not this. So, we start arguing and convince them that this is the best practice that has been universally accepted. Some of them are stubborn and are not willing to change their positions. Sometimes we end up delivering as they want but we free [are not ultimately responsible] our responsibility with what they insist on". (SP16)

While the previous quotes highlight how the lack of customers' operant resources affect the solution process at the early phase of the co-creation, data also revealed that customers' resource deficiency can also lead to suboptimal value-in-use at the solution deployment and after implementation phases. The interview data highlighted that customers who lack technical skills may not be able to use the solution effectively

and utilise solutions value-in-use. For the provider operating in the ICT sector, it is problematic if customers are unable to manage their solutions effectively or fail to report a broken product. One provider informant gave an example of how customers may misuse the WIFI internet solution and, thus, experience suboptimal value-in-use:

“Some novice customers may destroy their experience in using our telecom and WIFI solutions by not putting any type of security on these solutions. Those types of customers start saying I took very fast internet solution, but I can’t understand why it is slow and where the problem is. Eventually, they start blaming us for their misuse the service”. (SP16)

The above quote suggests that customers and providers jointly perceive the suboptimal value if customers fail to take all possible tools to secure their technological solutions. Providers experience suboptimal value if the customers blame their providers for their own mistakes (misuse the solution). Similarly, customers also perceive negative solution value-in-use as such misuse may disrupt their business processes and communications.

5.6.5 *Customers’ failure to read solutions contracts adequately*

Another practice that may lead to negative co-creation outcomes is associated with customers’ willingness to read and understand solutions contracts. A few informants reported that business customers may not invest time in reading and understanding technology-based solutions contracts. SP4 specifically raised this issue and commented that:

“Before we start developing any solutions, our business analysts prepare a Software Requirements Specification (SRS) document and we send it to the customer for reviewing and we then follow it up but no one reads this! If they do, they skim through it to show us they came with some superficial notes but they absolutely do not understand the terms properly”. (SP4)

If customers do not read and process their solution contract adequately, both customers and providers may experience negative value co-creation experiences at various phases of the solution process. For example, at the customisation and implementation

process, while the providers aim to generate the solution as indicated in the contract, customers may argue a lot with their providers and ask for further unrealistic requirements that have not been included in the solution contract. The managing director of SP12 offered an example of how customers' failure to read and understand solutions contracts in the ICT sector may lead to negative co-creation outcomes:

"What always happens with us is that when we come to implementation, customers start to say we did not ask for that, but we asked for this interface, feature, etc. We tell them, no it was clearly indicated and written in your contract and you signed on that. They then say let us change it to this interface or add this feature. Accordingly, we tell them that this is considered a change request and will incur extra cost. However, they then start arguing and say no this is the same project, we are not willing to pay extra. Eventually, we end up with an endless argument that sometimes leads to a project termination". (SP12)

The previous quote also underscores that negative value co-creation experiences perceived by both parties can also lead to value destruction (project termination) if the customer and the provider fail to reconcile for a better settlement. One customer informant seemed to blame his top management about missing an important aspect in their pharmaceutical system solution contract:

"It was obvious that the new staff started to learn the system by trial and error. For me as an IT manager, it is not my responsibility to train new pharmacists on the system. However, I have been asked to do so because our top management failed to consider this in the solution contract. They should have indicated on the contract that it is the supplier's responsibility to provide regular training for our new staff". (C1)

S4P, who raised customer practice toward solution contracts, put forward a practical procedure to mitigate any suboptimal value caused by lack of customers' understanding of solutions contracts:

"We have learned to send customers our Software Requirements Specification (SRS) document and give them five working days to read it carefully before we do a presentation. We then present it and challenge them to make sure they have read it. This will allow us to have their feedback and final confirmation. This always lessens the hassle of ["I do not know" and "I have not read that"]". (SP4)

5.6.6 *Customer contact person-related issues*

Interview participants also highlighted that both customer and providers in the ICT solutions sector may experience negative co-creation outcomes if customers mismanage their process associated with appointing their contact person during the co-creation. First, solutions providers raised the issue that some customers may appoint an irrelevant business function/department to communicate with them during the co-creation. For example, according to provider interviewees, an ERP software solution which integrates data from different business departments of the customer firm requires access to some users from these departments and to get their views and insights of their expectations from the solution. However, the data indicated that a customer may not allow their solutions providers to reach the relevant staff (e.g., users) at the customisation level and only assign managing the project to the IT department of the customer's firm. This practice was found to cause a negative value co-creation experience perceived by providers as it influences their ability to reach the relevant business functions and users to gain their insights about purchased solutions. A business development manager describes how such practice lead to destroy value co-creation experience:

"Sometimes the IT team of customer firms are our main problem especially if they are appointed to be as the sole project owner for the solution. The problem arises when these guys [IT team] take control and represent their firms to manage and receive the solution project. If this happens, we find it difficult to reach other relevant functions such as Finance and HR. IT guys do not know about the financial-related matter; therefore, I also need to talk to the financial staff. That is very annoying". (SP9)

The previous quote implies that assigning some technology-based solution project only to the IT department of the customer's firm may leave other relevant business owners and customer users missing from giving providers their input and views about the solution. At 2500 employees, C6 acknowledged that their IT department was the main contact owner and dominant during generating and implementing their Share-Point solution. However, although the solution was purchased to fulfil a need that pertains to the communication between the outdoor and indoor sales and employees in shops, relevant people were not genuinely involved in offering their views and input

of that solution with their solution provider. This resulted in some users' requirements not being met at the first time of solution deployment:

“As we had no technical experience before developing the SharePoint solution, our IT guys were the business owner with the supplier. As a solution user, I communicated our sales team's requirements to our IT department of whom our requirements were passed to the solution provider. However, after we started using the SharePoint, we noticed that there were other requirements emerged by the sales staff such as customers' contracts, and customer care tools. We therefore, contacted them [the supplier] again in response to user notes. I think if they were involved from the beginning as users, these issues could have been addressed through mutual interaction”. (C6)

The previous quote emphasises the importance of including the customer users at the customer requirements and customisation phases to analyse their needs in the context where the solution will be implemented. Another customer practice which was found to cause suboptimal value perceived by the solution providers during the co-creation is receiving various comments and requests from more than one contact person from the customer firm during co-creation. SP13 argued that such issues create confusion and obstruct their work:

“Sometimes our back office receives many calls from different people from the customer firm at the same time. This is annoying as different people may give you conflicting requests and you get confused who is the right one and to whom to listen to”. (SP13)

5.6.7 Providers' failure to meet solutions deadlines

The majority of customer participants were particularly critical about providers' ability to meet their deadline during solution development and implementation. Customers' interviewees pointed out that they perceive suboptimal value if their providers fail to deliver their technology solutions on time. While discussing constraints embedded in developing and implementing technology-based solutions, the IT manager of C1 suddenly paused, smiled and stated, *“Vendors, unfortunately, do not respect time”*.

Poor time management practices by provider firms was found to cause interruption in the customer process. The financial manager of C8 identified one reason for providers' inability to finish their solutions on time:

“Suppliers are always busy in several projects, this influences their abilities to support and serve us properly and finish at the right time”. (C8)

However, being busy in many other projects may not be seen as the only reason that hinders solution providers to meet their solutions deadlines. At 2,000 employees, the pre-sales manager commented on why they sometimes fail to deliver solution projects on time:

“Bureaucracy here weakens our motivation for a project, because every manager in relevant departments sometimes tries to prove that he is the main influencer on the success of a project. A long chain of command is needed to proceed in every project. Because of this, customers tell us that we interrupted and stopped their business. Eventually, this could be a detrimental problem for our future relationship. We should work like a silo in an integrated and cooperative manner. Every single department must follow and keep alert with other departments.” (S10)

In conclusion, the above quote summarises why it is important to identify and manage customer and provider practices that lead to negative co-creation outcomes. As highlighted by (S10), if one party perceives the other party’s practices negatively during the co-creation, this may jeopardise the future customer/supplier relationship.

5.7 Chapter Summary

Drawing on 44 interviews with customer and provider firms, this chapter reported on the solutions value co-creation phases in the ICT sector in low customer readiness markets (LCRM). The first section of this chapter began by identifying the characteristics of the Jordanian solution’s market. These characteristics were shown to have an impact on the nature of solutions offered in the ICT sector. Rather than offering highly customised solutions offerings, Jordanian solutions providers actually offered highly standardised offerings. The second section of this chapter answered the first research question of this thesis through identifying four distinct, but complementary roles performed by solutions providers throughout the co-creation phases to increase customer readiness to operate within the ICT sector solution market.

The third section answered the second research question and highlighted the great relevance of adopting a multiple solution value propositions approach in the ICT solutions sector. This section also highlighted how such an approach affects co-creation activities. The fourth section reported on the impact of the Arabian business culture on solutions value co-creation, answering the third research question. Issues related to using *wasta* connections, Arab buyers treatment of time and the role of senior management team of supplier firms were analysed respectively. Finally, the last section reported on the customers' and providers' practices that lead to negative value co-creation experiences, answering the fourth research question. Specifically, the findings highlighted various customer and provider practices in their processes and resources that may cause suboptimal value that is experienced by either one or two parties.

Having reported on the empirical findings of this study, the next chapter compares these findings in the context of the current solutions marketing research.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the empirical findings from the interview data analysis in the context of previous solutions marketing literature. This thesis reports a study of solutions marketing in the ICT sector in less mature markets. It raises four interrelated questions that concern value co-creation and co-destruction activities, solutions value proposition and the impact of Arabian business culture on the customer solutions process.

Chapter 2 reviewed the pertinent literature related to the customer solutions concept and showed how this concept embodies the theoretical notion of value co-creation of the S-D. The literature concluded that although business customers are the primary focus of solutions business, the aspect of marketing these solutions, particularly how providers and customers integrate their resources and co-create value, has received less attention in the extant solutions provision literature (Nordin and Kowalkowski, 2010; Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). Therefore, the basis of this research was to contribute to the lack of research in the solutions marketing field by answering the following research questions:

RQ1: What influence, if any, does low customer readiness in solutions markets have on the role of the provider in the solutions value co-creation process?

RQ2: How does adopting a multiple solution value proposition approach influence value communication and the co-creation activity?

RQ3: How does an Arabian business culture impact the solutions value co-creation process?

RQ4: What provider and customer practices lead to destroying value co-creation experiences in solutions exchanges?

Through the lens of interpretivism as a research philosophy, the present study utilised a purposeful sampling technique and conducted 44 in-depth interviews with Jordanian

customer and provider representatives in the ICT solutions sector (Chapter 4). The previous chapter (5) reported the findings from the qualitative interviews through presenting findings pertinent to each question. This chapter presents discussion of results from the qualitative interviewing with respect to research questions. In order to provide a comprehensive background about the nature of the Jordanian solutions market, it is important first to discuss this study's findings in relation to customer readiness to operate within technology-based solutions markets and co-create value. Hence, the next section discusses Jordanian customer readiness to operate within the ICT solutions market in light of customer readiness criteria (see Table 2.5) to operate within solutions markets synthesised in chapter 2.

6.2 Low customer readiness market and solutions offered

In reviewing the literature in chapter 2, customer readiness in solutions markets was defined as *customers' willingness to invest and pay for solutions, apply and integrate their resources effectively in the co-creation, and adopt and utilise solutions value-in-use*. Previous solutions marketing studies have largely drawn conclusions from empirical work focused on markets with high customer readiness, assuming that customers are able to effectively operate within solutions markets and, thus, co-create value with their solution providers (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Petri and Jacob, 2016). Research designs have focused on the European Union, USA, and Scandinavian contexts. However, the same research group identified various reasons that hamper customers from effectively operating within solutions markets. These reasons appeared to influence customer readiness throughout various phases of the solutions value co-creation process defined in previous literature (see Figure 2.4).

The empirical findings of this study from the ICT solutions sector in Jordan strongly validate the appropriateness of this market to investigate value co-creation activities in LCRMs. At the early phase of co-creation activities, extant solutions marketing theory developed in the HCRM context suggests that customers' focus should be on solutions value-in-use (Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016) and TCO (Bonemeier, Burianek and Reichwald, 2010; Windler et al., 2016) when they engage with

their solutions providers. However, the findings suggested (see Section 5.2) that Jordanian business customers and their providers had different value orientations at the early phase of the solutions value co-creation phases. While solutions providers focused on solutions value-in-use and how their solution offerings add value to the customer's business, business buyers emphasised short term value objectives (value-in-exchange) such as price reductions. Therefore, this imposed two challenges for Jordanian solutions providers. First, providers had to change customers' focus from value-in-exchange to value-in-use that customers obtain when buying a solution. Second, the constant pressing on solutions providers for further price reductions was found to threaten providers' ability to recoup the cost of customisation and to make a decent profit margin.

The constant emphasis on short-term value and price reductions that dominated amongst Jordanian business customers can be explained by two main reasons. First, the current political crisis that hit the area around Jordan including Syria, Iraq and other countries has created political instability in the region, negatively affecting the Jordanian economy. As a result, budgets set by Jordanian customer firms for solutions offerings are tight as buyers were found not to be sure how the market will function in the future. Secondly, lack of customers' awareness of technology-based solutions, which is combined sometimes with customers' underestimation of the value of these solutions, have decreased Jordanian customers' willingness to invest and pay for customised solutions. For instance, the software intangibility and its uncertain value before usage (Valtakoski, 2015) was found to affect Jordanian buyers' decisions to initiate a solution relationship with their solutions providers.

Moving to the requirements definition phase, solutions marketing research in HCRMs assumes that customers are able to autonomously define a clear picture of their solutions goal and objectives and this activity prompts them to engage with an external solutions provider (Petri and Jacob, 2016). Furthermore, this research suggests that sharing and integrating customer resources including information on their needs, budget and requirements with their solutions providers is fundamental in the value co-creation process (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). However, the empirical data from an LCRM exemplified by Jordan suggested that customers were not able to effectively leverage their resources and perform their role in the co-creation.

Specifically, Jordanian business customers were not sufficiently clear about the resources that they need to contribute in the co-creation such as information on their needs, solutions objectives, budget, and financial resources (see Section 5.2). This was due to the lack of expertise in buying technology-based solutions alongside the high information asymmetry between customers and their solutions providers (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). This high information asymmetry overlapped with different proposed offerings received by different solutions providers at once, leading to unrealistic solutions requirements set by business customers.

Finally, at the solutions deployment and post-deployment phase, customers in less mature solutions markets may have low readiness if they are unable to use and utilise solutions value-in-use on their own (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Storbacka and Pennanen, 2014). The empirical findings from the Jordanian ICT solutions sector (see Section 5.2) also reinforce this criterion and show that Jordanian business customers struggle to sufficiently derive solution value-in-use. This was mainly because of the negative attitudes adopted by customer users toward technology-based solutions. These negative assumptions held by Jordanian customers towards technology-based solutions are likely to be related to the fact Arabian people are less likely to adopt new technological offerings as they bring more uncertainty and anxiety about the future (Hofstede; Hofstede, and Minkov, 2010).

Unsurprisingly, these customer characteristics were found to significantly influence the nature of solutions through offering highly standardised solutions, which are designed and developed from predetermined platforms and components (Nordin and Kowalkowski, 2010; Storbacka, 2011). Nevertheless, the customisation aspect was viewed by respondents as a profound element of technology-based solution offerings that occur when implementing these solutions for every individual customer. Such standardised solutions fall under the category of customised standardisation between the two extremes of pure individualisation and pure standardisation differentiation defined broadly in the previous work (Lampel and Mintzberg, 1996). In a customised standardisation strategy, the basic design of the solution is not customised to individual customers, but every customer requires specific customisation when selecting the best solution components and configuring these components to fit with the customer's business (Lampel and Mintzberg, 1996). This distinction in the solutions offered in the ICT sector in Jordan is important as Nordin and Kowalkowski (2010) note that

many scholars remain silent about their solutions characteristics, suggesting that researchers should be more specific when they describe their solutions to better develop our knowledge about different forms of customisation.

Overall, the results related to the prevalence of highly standardised solutions in the Jordanian ICT sector may be explained by the fact that the size of the market is small, and customers may have less sophisticated needs and problems than extant research highlights (e.g., Sawhney, 2006; Evanschitzky, Wangenheim and Woisetschläger, 2011). This finding, however, is strongly consistent with the recent work which suggests solutions provision should be linked with markets and customers' characteristics (Sawhney, 2006; Brax and Jonsson, 2009; Storbacka and Pennanen, 2014).

Having discussed the findings related to customers' limitations in operating within a technology-based solutions market and co-creating value, the next section discusses this study's findings on the provider's role in increasing customer readiness to operate and co-create value throughout the well-established solutions value co-creation phases.

6.3 RQ1: What influence, if any, does low customer readiness in solutions markets have on the role of the provider in the solutions value co-creation process

6.3.1 Market Development Phase

Although previous literature has identified some reasons as discussed in the previous section that hamper customers from effectively operating within solutions markets, theoretically informed understanding of how solutions providers overcome such barriers to support and enhance lack of customer readiness and co-create value with their solutions providers remains scant in the extant literature (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). The relational process embedded in the solutions co-creation phases was conceptualised as the reciprocal interactions that occur between the customer and provider before, during and after developing and implementing customised solutions (Nordin and Kowalkowski, 2010). Initially, this process

was proposed by Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj (2007) and encompassed four main relational processes; requirements definition, customisation and integration, solutions deployment and post-deployment respectively (see Figure 2.3).

The recent academic advancement of this process (see Figure 2.4) was put forward by Petri and Jacob (2016) who suggest that value co-creation phases of customer solutions begin when customers identify their exact needs and goals that prompt them to approach an external solutions provider, reflecting their high readiness to operate autonomously within a solutions market (Petri and Jacob, 2016). This study, in a market characterised by low levels of customer readiness, however, suggests that customers in LCRMs may not be able to operate autonomously, and effectively perform their roles in the solutions value co-creation process. Therefore, the study suggests that, in such markets, solutions providers need to perform additional roles to compensate for customers' lack of readiness to perform their roles in the solutions co-creation process. In particular, solutions providers lead the value co-creation process phases through performing various roles at various phases.

First, the study proposes a new value co-creation phase that is market development which precedes the requirements definition identified by Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj (2007). The need for the market development process is because customers may not be able to recognise their problems and needs that prompt them to engage with external solutions providers due to high information asymmetry embedded in technology based-solutions, their lack of awareness of the value of intangible software solutions and their tight budgets allocated to these types of solutions (see section 5.3.1). The market development phase aims at increasing customer willingness to enter solutions markets and engage with a solutions provider. The empirical evidence from the Jordanian ICT solutions sector suggests that this phase consists of two main activities, customer education and value demonstration. These activities are discussed in the two subsections below.

6.3.1.1 Customer Education

Lusch and Vargo (2006b, p.44) put forward that “skills and knowledge is the fundamental unit of exchange”. In a customer solutions context, these skills and knowledge are key for customers to draw on when they engage in a solution relationship. It helps

them to provide suppliers with information on their needs and objectives before initiating a solution relationship (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). However, the empirical data from an LCRM in the ICT sector suggests that Jordanian solutions providers had to proactively engage in educational activities with their business customers. These educational activities aimed at increasing the level of operant resources of customer firms such knowledge and skills of technology-based solutions (see section 5.3.1.1). Through performing the role of solutions knowledge provider, Jordanian solutions providers aimed at creating awareness of technology-based solutions and its value in enhancing and improving the customer's business.

This role is crucial in the Jordanian market as customers were found to underestimate technology-based solution offerings and did not possess the same quantity and quality of information as their providers. This affected their ability and readiness to initiate a solution relationship. Therefore, this role is of particular importance as current theory posits that the amount of knowledge and skills a customer has will increase their ability to co-create value effectively (Payne et al., 2008). As a result, customers become more aware of technology-based solutions and their value, thus, increasing their readiness to enter the solutions market. However, it can be inferred from the findings that adopting the role of solutions knowledge provider by suppliers in the ICT sector should not only be applied in LCRMs. As highlighted by SP7 (see section 5.3.1.1), technology-based solutions are likely to be continuously updated and encompass high technical innovation (Miles et al., 1995), leaving customers unaware of such types of solutions.

The customer education activity embedded in the solutions market development phase is consistent with previous marketing research on information asymmetry between the customer and supplier. Santos and Spring (2015) suggest that providers need to educate their customers to reduce knowledge asymmetry and, thus, increase their participation while delivering knowledge intensive business services (KIBS). In particular, the role of the solutions knowledge provider was adopted by Jordanian suppliers to reduce the knowledge gap between them and their potential customers through providing them with the skills and knowledge they need (Bell 2017, Bell 2007) to increase their readiness to operate within solutions markets.

Importantly, the findings highlight the importance of integrating the operant resources in the co-creation at the solutions network level (Jaakkola and Hakanen, 2013). In

particular, The study offered an example of how actors at a solutions network level (suppliers, their partners and customers) integrate their operant resources (knowledge and skills) to develop the Jordanian technology-based solutions market. Jordanian solutions providers operating in the ICT sector and their partners such as Oracle, Microsoft, IBM and Cisco engaged in creating awareness sessions and educational activities to increase customers' knowledge and skills of technology-based solutions, increasing their readiness to operate within the solutions market at an early phase of the co-creation (see section 5.3.1.1).

6.3.1.2 Value Demonstration

The second market activity approach adopted by solutions providers to develop technology-based solutions in the Jordanian market is value demonstration (see section 5.3.1.2). After providing customers with knowledge about an available solution and its importance through adopting the role of solution knowledge providers, solution providers in Jordan complemented this role by demonstrating their solutions value. Specifically, providers played the role of value demonstrator through proving two types of value, economic value and functional value (Mustak, 2017). First, the functional demonstration of solutions value provided Jordanian customers with a realistic picture of what providers' software solutions looks like and what it can do. This was important in the early co-creation phases as customers had low readiness and willingness to invest and pay for technology-based solutions. Valtakoski (2015) argues that such functional demonstration aims at convincing potential buyers, providing them with evidence of the software's value and reducing the vagueness derived from the intangibility element associated with offering software solutions.

Second, Jordanian solutions providers demonstrated the economic benefits such as cost savings derived from their solutions. Previous research suggests that the buying centre of the customer firm should apply the concept of total cost of ownership (TCO) in their solutions buying (Bonnemeier, Burianek and Reichwald, 2010; Windler et al., 2016). However, due to the lack of willingness of Jordanian customers to invest and pay for customised solutions, as discussed earlier, the customers' emphasis was on short-term orientations and solution price to the extent that such focus limits their ability to emphasise value derived from the solution in-use. Therefore, the economic value

demonstration activity is of particular importance in such market to convince and influence customers' emphasis to shift to value in-use. The economic demonstration of value is consistent with that of Storbacka (2011) who postulates that selling solution necessitates that solutions providers quantify the value for their customers at an early phase of solution development. Hence, Jordanian solutions providers quantified their solutions value by applying the total cost of ownership approach (see section 5.3.1.2) to demonstrate how their solution can save the customer's money (Storbacka and Penanen, 2014).

However, it is important to highlight that using the functional or economic value demonstration when developing solutions markets should not be seen as mutually exclusive, instead they are intertwined. As providers highlighted, it depends on the customer business drivers and concerns. In summary, the role of the solutions knowledge provider and solutions value demonstrator, embedded in the market activity phase, is aimed at increasing customer willingness and readiness to enter the solutions market at an early phase of the co-creation. Collectively, it can be argued that both roles in LCRMs are seen as an important means to accomplish "*the create demand*" activity suggested by Storbacka, 2011 (p.703) where solutions providers aim at generating solutions sales leads.

Having discussed the market development phase of solutions value co-creation process in an LCRM context and its two embedded activities, the next subsection discusses the provider's role in supporting the customer value creation process at the requirements' definition.

6.3.2 *Providers' role at the requirements' definition: Customer resources organiser*

The requirements definition phase was defined in previous literature as the process in which solutions providers and customers jointly define customers' requirements' of a particular solution (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011). Customers input including information on their needs and solutions objectives, budget and scope is vital at this phase to enable their solutions providers to choose the optimal components to provide a suitable solution (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). However, the empirical findings from an LCRM context showed that business customers in Jordan were not sufficiently clear about their solution scope and financial

resources (see section 5.3.2). This could be attributable to two main reasons. First, Jordanian business customers appeared to lack proper organisation and planning of their operant resources such as solutions budget, timeline, project skills. Second, this finding could also be explained by the fact that the majority of technology-based solutions that the customers purchased are non-core business solutions, reflecting the limited expertise they had before purchasing different types of solutions offerings (Flowers, 2007).

Accordingly, solutions providers were found to play the role of customer resources organisers to help customers to perform their role effectively at this phase. For instance, solutions providers helped customers to document their requirements, and plan their financial resources when setting solutions payments and budgets. In turn, novice Jordanian business customers appeared to welcome the providers' role in organising their resources and were found to be dependent upon their suppliers in specifying their business requirements involved in solutions offerings.

This result from an immature market, however, strongly corroborates with the argument that states that customers may not always be able to articulate their problems and requirements to their solutions providers (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Nordin and Kowalkowski, 2010). Therefore, solutions providers had to adopt the role of customer resources organiser to help customers in planning and organising their resources which are contributed in the co-creation at the requirement definition.

Importantly, the empirical findings emphasised the significant role of the pre-sales team of supplier firms involved in the ICT sector (see section 5.3.1.2). The pre-sales engineers appeared to perform the role of technology experts who educate customers about advanced solutions, understand the problem a customer wants to solve and advises them on the best technological offerings. This is a significant finding because although previous research suggests different employees from different functional units are involved in delivering solutions (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007), current research focuses only on activities that are enacted by salespeople as a major influence on solutions sales performance during the solution's co-creation phases (e.g., Panagopoulos, Rapp and Ogilvie, 2017). However, this study suggests that developing pre-sales capabilities is essential at the early co-creation phases in the ICT solutions

sector to enact customer education activities and scope customer-specific requirements. Solutions providers in Jordan pointed out that the pre-sales function accounts for the success of their solutions business. One plausible explanation is that ICT sector solutions hold a high degree of technological complexity and innovation. In addition, given that customers are often unable to articulate their exact requirements, the pre-sales engineers' involvement was vital to help them to document and write a request for proposal (RFP).

6.3.3 Provider role at the deployment and post-deployment phase: Value-in-use enabler

Extant solutions marketing research from HCRM described the solution deployment and after deployment phase as being where providers need to install the solution and conduct routine maintenance and constantly ensure the customers' evolving needs are met (Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011). While solutions practitioners consistently agree with this delineation, the empirical data highlighted that Jordanian business customers did not adopt the providers' offering easily into their processes, negatively affecting their ability to utilise value-in-use on their own. Jordanian solutions providers and customer decision-makers perceived adopting technology-based solutions among customer users as a major challenge at this phase (see section 5.3.3).

Jordanian business users had negative assumptions about such solutions, assuming that the solution would replace them or would bring the upheaval of fundamental changes to their comfortable way of completing processes, thereby negatively influencing solutions effectiveness. These negative assumptions held by Jordanian customers towards technology-based solutions are likely to be related to the fact Arabian people are less likely to adopt new technological offerings as they bring more uncertainty and anxiety about the future (Hofstede, 2001). There are, however, other possible explanations to the slow adoption of technology-based solutions such as difficulty of use or lack of users' expertise in solutions originated in the ICT sector.

Therefore, the empirical findings indicated that Jordanian solutions providers played the role of value-in-use enabler at the solution implementation phase in the ICT sector. This role consisted of some activities and procedures taken by solutions providers to increase solution adoption by customer users. This role is important as extant research suggests if customers fail to adopt providers' offerings, providers and customers may

experience ineffective solutions implementation (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007) or solutions failure (Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016). Therefore, Jordanian suppliers found it is essential to develop and implement a user-friendly solution and maintain close communication with the customer users to empower them, thus enabling them to utilise solution value-in-use.

This finding suggests that deriving customer value-in-use in ICT sector may happen at a slow pace, particularly if customer users show reluctance to adopt technology-based solutions. As a result, the role of value-in-use enabler performed by the supplier becomes increasingly important in the ICT solutions sector to help customer users in adopting solutions into their processes. This result strongly supports the theoretical argument which posits that interacting parties involved in the co-creation process have opportunities to influence one another's processes (Gronroos, 2011). By adopting the role of value in-use enabler in the ICT sector, solutions providers can engage with their customer practices to influence customers' solution adoption and, thereby, solutions outcome. The role of *value-in-use enabler* is in line with the role of *value experience supporter* suggested by Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola (2012) where suppliers assist customers to ensure that they achieve greater value-in-use. However, the role of value-in-use enabler goes beyond assisting customers to achieve a greater value-in-use to help and enable them to adopt the solution into their business process in the ICT solution context (see section 5.3.3).

Having discussed the provider's role in the solutions value co-creation phases in an LCRM, this study proposes an extended solutions marketing conceptualisation for low customer readiness markets in an ICT sector. Figure 6.1 extends and contributes to extant solutions conceptualisation defined by Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj (2007) and enhanced by Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller (2011) by adding (1) the market development phase that involves necessary early market activities roles performed by solutions providers to increase customer readiness in operating within solutions markets, and, (2) the providers' roles in the supporting customers' limitation in performing their roles in the co-creation in respect to each phase. Hence, this study responds to previous calls (e.g., Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Nordin and Kowalkowski, 2010; Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Petri and Jacob, 2016) to examine the well known solution conceptualisation in different markets and contexts. While previous studies assume

that customers and solutions providers are equal partners in the value co-creation process (e.g., Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Petri and Jacob, 2016), this study suggests that providers lead and dominate co-creation activities in LCRMs by performing some additional roles to increase customer readiness to effectively operate and co-create value.

Having discussed the empirical findings, which answered the first research question of this study, the next section discusses findings on the importance of adopting a multiple solutions value proposition and its implication on value co-creation activities.

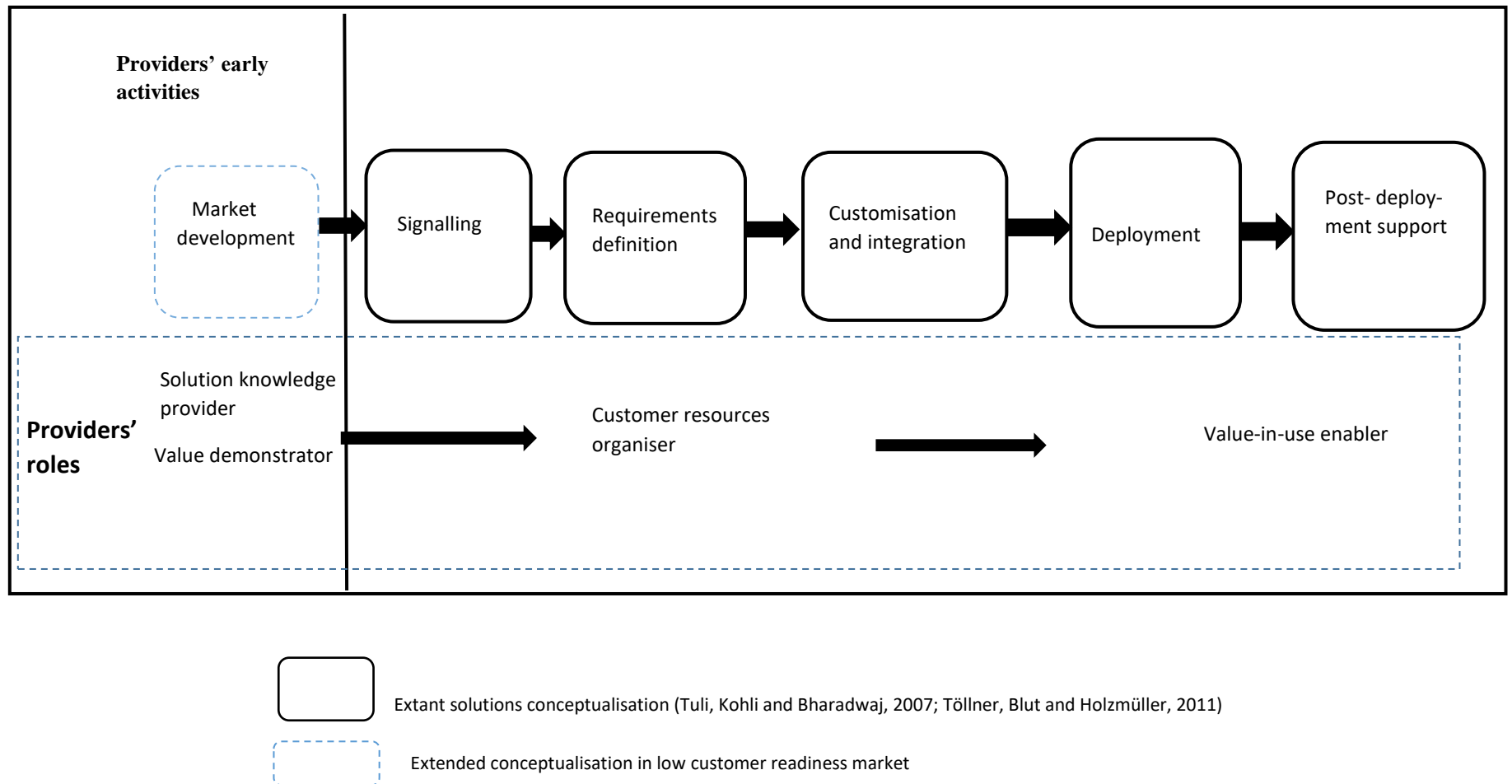


Figure 6.1: Extended solutions conceptualisation in low customer readiness market in the ICT sector

6.4 RQ3: How does adopting a multiple solution value proposition approach influence value communication and the co-creation activity?

The term value proposition was defined in previous literature as “*reciprocal promises of value, operating to and from suppliers and customers seeking an equitable exchange*” (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006, pp. 334–335). Value proposition represents an “*invitation to play*” whereby the supplier and customer propose and outline their views and expectations regarding the co-creation activities and value-in-use (Eggert et al., 2018). Previous solutions marketing research has focused on the linear customer solution process without emphasising a multiple solution value proposition approach and its influence on co-creation activities (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2011). This has resulted in a homogeneous view of solution value proposition that is characterised with intense co-creation activities, long solutions sales cycles and highly customised and complex solutions offerings (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011; Petri and Jacob, 2016).

This study proposed a need to provide deeper insights into a multiple solution value propositions as customers not only need complex and highly customised offerings but also expect solutions that match their needs and function reliably (Brax and Jonsson, 2009; Payne and Frow, 2014). Therefore, the second research question was formulated to address this particular gap and highlight offering a multiple solutions value proposition and its implication on co-creation activities.

The empirical findings from the Jordanian ICT sector provided evidence that providers adopted two types of customer solution value propositions to their local and global markets (see section 5.4). Each type was communicated to customers differently and the intensity of solution co-creation activities varied accordingly. Adopting such multiple customer solution value propositions was largely driven by the variance in customers’ characteristics. For example, differences in willingness to pay, attitude to opex vs. capex expenditure, and number of users, appeared to prompt suppliers to communicate two types of solutions offerings that match the need of each customer type (Storbacka, 2011; Windler et al., 2016). Table 6.1 shows these distinct types of customer value propositions outlining how they are communicated differently.

Table 6.1: *Multiple view of customer solution value propositions in the ICT sector*

	Strategic customer solution value proposition (see section 5.4.1)	Transactional customer solution value proposition (see section 5.4.2)
Empirical example	On-premise offerings (SP2, SP6, and SP11)	Cloud-based solution offerings (SP3, SP6 and SP10)
Offering characteristics	Complex	Simple
Selling approach followed	Strategic	Transactional
Competencies of sales persons	Advanced	Fundamental
Intensity level of co-creation	Deep	Basic
Number of people involved in sales team	Large	Fewer

The first type is the strategic customer value proposition associated with offering complex and on-premise technology-based offerings. This type of customer value proposition was communicated to customers through adopting a strategic selling approach focusing on outcome-based contractual agreements (Marcos Cuevas, 2018). Specifically, this type of solution offering was communicated to large enterprises that had more sophisticated needs and were keen to have more control over their technological infrastructure. Hence, providers focused on outcome-based contractual agreements (value in-use) to improve their customer business processes and reduce their operational costs (see section 5.4.1).

In contrast, providers reported that smaller customers often had less sophisticated business needs and perceived technology-based offerings as an extra cost burden (see section 5.4.2). Therefore, adopting a transactional selling approach towards this type of customer was more appropriate when communicating cloud-based solutions. Marcos Cuevas (2018) points out that a transactional selling approach involves discrete sales interactions that are primarily driven by customer emphasis on price and cost reductions. In the study's context, this transactional selling approach was largely appropriate when communicating the value of cloud-based solution offerings to smaller customers, enabling a pay-per-use service and, thus, they did not need to invest in heavy

IT infrastructure. This finding is consistent with the notion that customers require solutions that are most appropriate to their concerns and usage-context rather than a full range of complex goods and services (Brax and Jonsson, 2009; Payne and Frow, 2014). Indeed, the identification of twin-track specific customer solutions offered in the ICT sector emphasises the role of technological advances as a basis for developing novel solutions offerings (Payne et al., 2017).

Moreover, the competency level of the sales people involved in communicating both types of solution value propositions varied considerably due to the offer's characteristics and customer sophistication (see Table 6.1). While communicating the strategic solutions value proposition (e.g., on-premise offering) required sales persons to have advanced competencies and market knowledge; sales persons needed basic and fundamental competencies to communicate the transactional value proposition (e.g., simple and pay-per-use offerings). Similarly, the findings showed that solutions co-creation activities may not necessarily be always intricate and intense as extant solutions marketing research implies (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Petri and Jacob, 2016). While communicating value propositions associated with on-premise solutions to large customers' involved extensive interaction and collaboration between the customer and supplier, co-creation is often on an ad hoc basis when communicating cloud-based technology solutions to smaller customers.

In summary, the study empirically emphasises the dynamic nature of value proposition in solutions offered in the ICT sector, suggesting that successful solutions providers need to adopt both strategic and transactional approaches simultaneously when communicating their solutions offerings to their business customers. This result is strongly in line with recent work that suggests suppliers are likely to combine both transactional and strategic selling approaches in business markets (Marcos Cuevas, 2018) and also extends this work by providing empirical insights into how such a combination is demonstrated in the ICT sector. Recognising the distinction made between the two customer value propositions is important because it assists and guides solutions providers in allocating and planning their resources that are contributed and shared in the co-creation. For instance, given that the number of smaller business customers is higher than large enterprise, providers had to have a larger number of their salesforce dedicated to smaller customers for a better reach.

Having discussed the findings that answered the second research question, the next section discusses findings related to the third research question.

6.5 RQ3: How does an Arabian business culture impact the solutions value co-creation process?

While previous research on solutions marketing has provided important insights into how customer and provider firms interact and co-create value within solutions exchange (e.g., Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Petri and Jacob, 2016), the impact of cultural issues on solution value co-creation phases has not been sufficiently highlighted. This is surprising because it has been argued the actions of actors (resources integrators) involved in co-creation are highly influenced by their social and cultural background (Edvardsson, Tronvoll and Gruber, 2011; Ostrom et al., 2015). Therefore, the third question of this study was formulated to investigate the impact of Arabian business culture on the co-creation activities embedded in solutions exchanges. By doing so, this study responds to recent calls for incorporating the unique cultural and social context into customer solutions research (e.g., Powers, Sheng and Juan, 2016; Sjödin, Parida and Wincent, 2016).

The empirical evidence of this study suggested that Arabian business culture was found to influence the customer solutions process at an early phase (see section 5.5). Particularly, the analysis identified three Arabian practices that were found to affect solutions value co-creation initiation. These practices were labelled as the influence of personal connections and *wasta*, Arabs' treatment of time and the involvement of top management of supplier firms. These two practices are discussed in the following subsections.

6.5.1 *Influence of personal connections and wasta*

Prior studies on Arabian business culture have confirmed that Arabian managers' practices are driven by personal relationships where social networks regulate behaviour (Hooker, 2009; Berger et al., 2015). The empirical evidence from the Jordanian customer solution business context showed that personal relationships among suppliers and customers influence the customer solution process at an early phase of co-creation in two ways.

First, the influence of personal relationships appeared to influence customers' decisions associated with choosing their suppliers (see section 5.5.1). Solutions providers pointed out that Jordanian customers sometimes rely on *wasta* connections (e.g., their friends, relatives) when deciding on a certain supplier. Mohamed and Mohamad (2011, p.412) argue that *the wasta* concept plays a significant role in how people live in the Arabian world, defining it as "*a form of favouritism that provides individuals with advantages not because of merit or right but because of who they know*". Jordanian solutions providers believed that customers may not necessarily choose their suppliers based on their expert knowledge or solutions performance outcomes (value-in-use) but, rather, their decision is influenced by how close that supplier is to the decision-maker of the customer firm (Hutchings and Weir, 2006; Berger et al., 2015). This result, associated with the provider's view on how Jordanian customers choose their suppliers, however, is in contrast with the current western solutions practice that suggests the supplier who wins the deal is the one that demonstrates their competencies and commitment to deliver effective solutions (Cova and Salle, 2007; Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011).

What is more interesting about this result is that the majority of customer participants denied their reliance on using favouritism (*wasta*) when choosing a solutions provider. The reported pragmatism by C7 and C9 (see section 5.5.1) may be explained by the high value of solutions and their visibility combined with the ubiquity of the solutions performance for employees of the buyer and, hence, the need to make sure this is the right decision for the whole organisation. As a result, customers may take great account of non-*wasta* variables such as price, solutions outcome performances, after-sales support and how user-friendly a solution is.

A possible explanation for this contradictory finding might be that although some Jordanian customers may still use *wasta* when choosing their solutions providers, as in the case with C3, it can be argued that there is a growing pattern emerging where Arabian customers tend to become less dependent on their relatives or close friends (*wasta*) when they source a high value solution offering. Perhaps the negative experience reported by C3 (see section 5.5.1), implied in selecting the wrong supplier due to their reliance on *wasta*, drives Jordanian business customers to exclude *wasta* connections when choosing their solutions providers. As argued by Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller (2011), the buyer firm typically seeks to reduce perceived risk associated with the price premium invested in a solution by ensuring choosing the right supplier.

The second important issue associated with the influence of interpersonal connections at the early co-creation is providers' need to develop strong personal relationships with customer firms which precedes value co-creation initiation. The data offered an evidence that having a strong personal relationship with customer firms enables Jordanian providers to generate sales leads and, thus, initiate solutions value co-creation (see section 5.5.1). If a provider's representative has a good personal relationship with the customer gatekeeper, decider or major influencer in the buying centre, it is more likely that the provider can gain better access to the decision-maker to communicate the solution value proposition. Hence, unlike western solutions co-creation practices which suggest providers' expert knowledge and competencies are the most significant operant resources that enable them to initiate a solution relationship with their customers (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Petri and Jacob, 2016), this study suggests that providers' investment in developing interpersonal relationships as an operant resource with the customer firm in Jordan is vital to initiate a solution relationship. Such investment enables solution providers to gain access to Arabian customers' decision-makers and then communicate the solution value proposition. This result strongly supports previous research that suggests Arabian business managers prefer to develop strong personal relationships with each other before discussing any business deal (Hutchings and Weir, 2006; Abosag and Lee, 2013).

6.5.2 Jordanian buyers' treatment of time

The second practice that appeared to influence the customer solutions process at the early phase value co-creation process is Jordanian buyers' treatment of time. Extant customer solutions research established in western markets exhibits a rapid engagement between the customer and supplier when the customer's needs and the perceived value of the solution is established (e.g., Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011; Petri and Jacob, 2016). However, solutions providers operating in the Jordanian ICT sector reported that Jordanian buyers fail to support the western norm of customers' urgency to initiate a solution relationship.

Although Jordanian providers and customers may establish the need for the solution and its perceived value, Jordanian customers appeared to follow a slow pace and take an excessive amount of time before closing a solution deal (see section 5.5.2). There are several possible explanations for this result. First, Jordanian business customers were largely unsure about their solutions requirements and objectives due to lack of

experience (operant resources) before buying technology-based solutions. Hence, being unsure about their requirements and obtaining different solutions insights from different suppliers may increase the difficulty of the buying decision and, thus, lead customers to not follow time limits and meet deadlines before closing a solution deal (see section 5.5.2). Second, the political instability that surrounds Jordan, which was found to influence their financial willingness to invest heavily in buying solutions, may also prompt customers to take a long time before closing any solution agreement to ensure the right decision is made.

All of these explanations suggest that Jordanian business customers perceive “time” during negotiation as an important resource that enables the right buying decision to be made. This interpretation of this finding seems to be consistent with the work of Hall (1966) who established that Arab culture is polychronic in nature, meaning that people may perceive the time as flexible and an indefinite resource and the conversation can be more indirect or circular (Limaye and Victor, 1991). In contrast, in a western context, where most of the customer solutions studies were carried out, people are characterised by a monochronic culture where they follow a clear time plan and come to the point very quickly. Therefore, this finding suggests that solutions providers in Jordan need to be patient and invest a significant amount of their resources in managing the time during the solution’s negotiation and also to cope with the customer’s slow pace associated with closing solutions deals.

6.5.3 Involvement of top management of supplier firms

Another selling approach that facilitates value co-creation initiation and was highlighted by customer firms is the importance of involving senior executives of supplier firms in close solution deals (see section 5.5.3). It appears that key Arabian customers prefer senior executives’ presence during solutions negotiations and finalising solution deals as this makes them feel that they are being treated with utmost importance. This result is in agreement with ALHussan, AL-Husan and Alhesan's (2017) findings which showed Arab senior managers’ involvement plays a significant role in Arab business relationships and creating value for firms.

Overall, these findings, reporting on the impact of Arabian business culture on the customer solutions process, have important implications on solutions value co-creation initiation. Figure 6.2, below, summarises the previous discussion and proposes a framework that explains how Arabian business culture influence co-creation initiation.

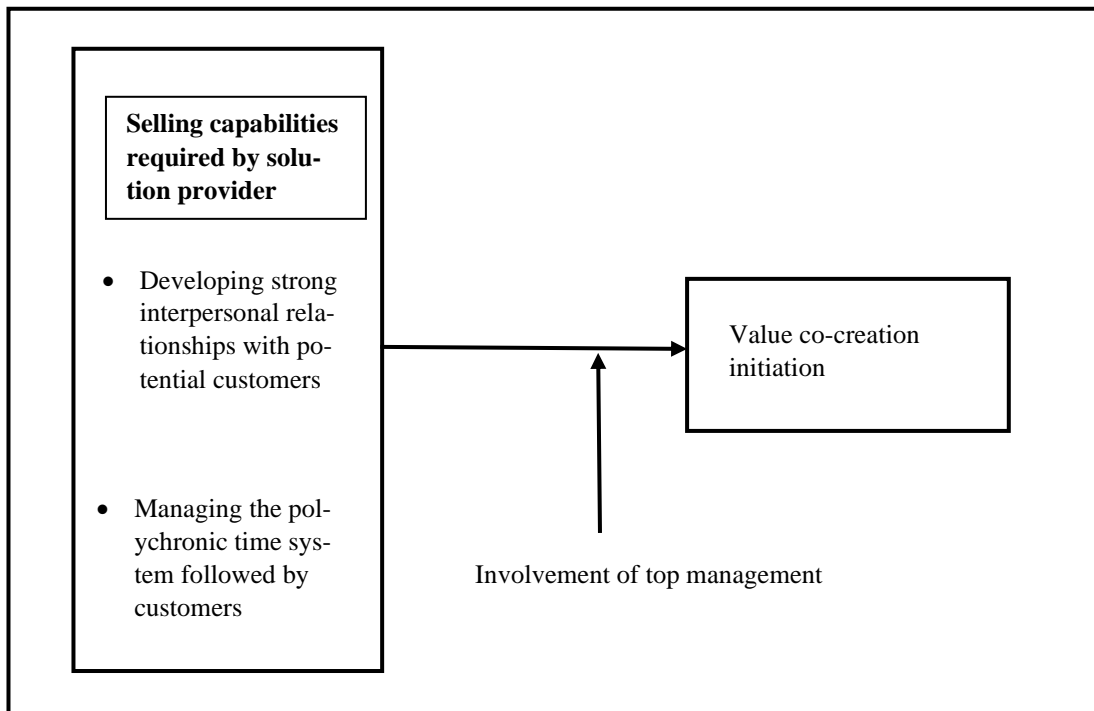


Figure 6.2: Impact of Arabian business culture on value co-creation based on empirical data from the Jordanian solutions market

In the above figure, Arabian solutions providers need to develop two solutions selling capabilities which enable them to initiate value co-creation. First, Arabian providers' need to develop strong interpersonal relationships to engage and interact with their potential solutions customers (see section 6.5.1). Second, Arabian solutions providers need to manage the polychronic time system adopted by Arabian customers and cope with the slow pace of customer urgency of solutions agreements. These two sales capabilities serve as enablers of solutions value co-creation in the Jordanian market. In the meantime, the involvement of CEOs of supplier firms comes into play at this phase as a strategic selling approach to facilitate solutions value co-creation initiation by finalising solutions deals when dealing with key customer accounts.

6.6 RQ4: What provider and customer practices lead to destroying value co-creation experiences in solution exchanges?

The notion that the resource integration process among actors involved in co-creation always generates positive outcomes has been challenged recently by a number of scholars (e.g., Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010; Vafeas, Hughes and Hilton, 2016;

Plé, 2017). These scholars argue that customers' and providers' interactive processes (value co-creation) can also be fraught with difficulties and challenges that impede achieving positive value co-creation experiences. These challenges are likely to emerge because actors may have divergent perceptions of value and incongruent expectations about how their resources should be applied and their roles should be performed during the co-creation (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012).

Therefore, the concept of value co-destruction of the S-D emerged to conceptualise how actors' behaviours and practices may be perceived negatively by them during the resource integration process, leading to adverse outcomes. The recent work of Vafeas, Hughes and Hilton (2016, p.470) labels the "*co-destruction*" term as "*value diminution*" and they define it as "*the perceived suboptimal value realization that occurs as a consequence of resources deficiencies in, or resource misuse by, one or more interacting actors*". The proponents of value co-destruction (e.g. Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010; Prior and Marcos-cuevas, 2016; Vafeas, Hughes and Hilton, 2016; Plé, 2017) have emphasised the importance of integrating both value co-creation and value co-destruction insights when studying the customer and provider exchanges, implying that these concepts should not be mutually exclusive.

Therefore, the suggestion taken forward in this study is that integrating the value co-destruction theme into the solutions value co-creation activities is of great relevance, given that there is a consensus among solutions scholars that ignoring provider and customer practices and processes that cause suboptimal value may lead to solutions failure (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016). The emerging scattered research on value co-destruction primarily diagnoses the reasons that lead to negative co-creation experience into resource deficiency and resource misuse by one or more of the parties involved in the co-creation (Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010; Vafeas, Hughes and Hilton, 2016). The present study adds to this literature by identifying some practices associated with providers and customers resources and processes that may lead to negative outcomes, when engaging in solutions co-creation activities (see Figure 6.3).

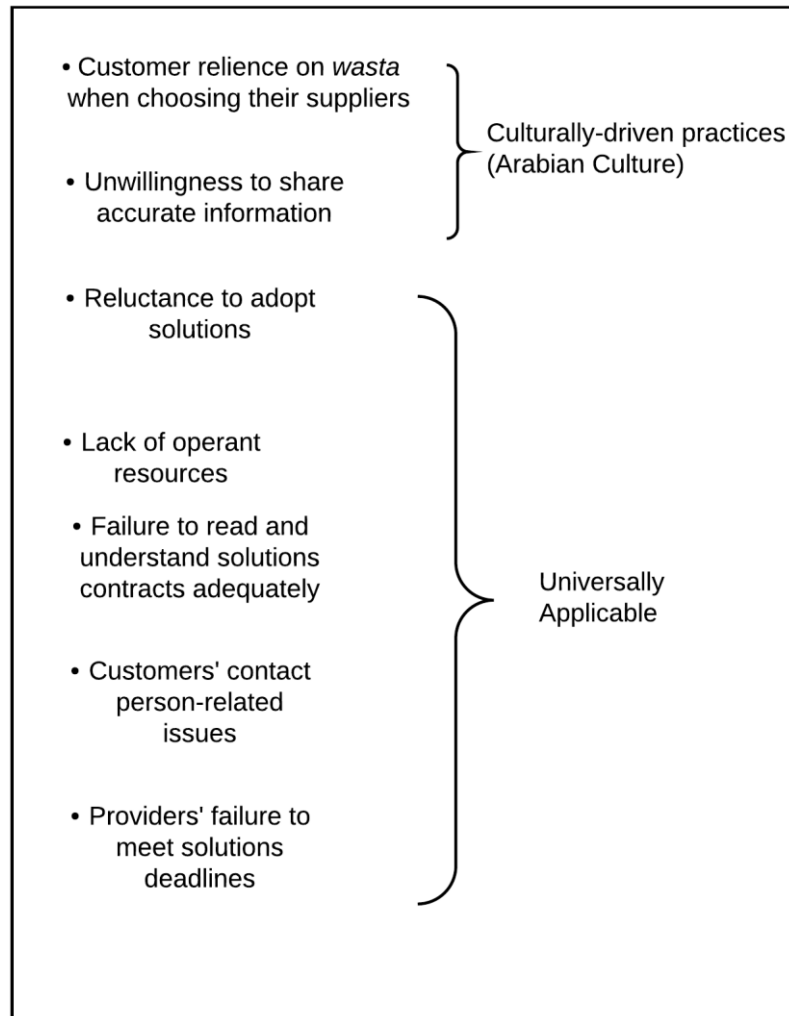


Figure 6.3: Customer and provider practices that cause negative co-creation outcomes

The diagram above outlines some specific practices from a dyadic perspective within the ICT solution sector which can jeopardise the co-creation. What stands out in this diagram, while most of these practices can be viewed universally, is that it highlights some deep-rooted cultural practices embedded in Arabian culture that cause failed interaction processes and suboptimal value. These practices and their influence on the co-creation experience are discussed in the next subsections.

6.6.1 *Using wasta practice when deciding on solution supplier*

Macdonald and colleagues (2016, p.114) have recently defined the customer solutions concept as “*the combining of supplier and customer processes and resources through a joint resource integration process to create collective and individual value in use*”.

Their definition implies that both customer and provider firms are required to orchestrate and integrate their resources (knowledge and expertise) and processes in order to create effective customer solutions (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). Processes involve procedures and interactions that both parties use to manage their activities and support the co-creation (Payne, Storbacka and Frow, 2008). However, value co-destruction thought argues that customers and providers may not necessarily act in an appropriate way as expected by the other party, thus, triggering suboptimal value (Vafeas, Hughes and Hilton, 2016; Plé, 2017).

Wasta practice is one of the Jordanian customer practices embedded in their solution buying processes which was found to cause negative co-creation experiences. Although data analysis showed that there is a growing pattern where Jordanian business customers have become less dependent on *wasta* practice when choosing their solution providers (see section 5.5.1), the study found that customers' reliance on *wasta* as a decisive factor when choosing their suppliers can result in a failed collaboration process to be perceived by suppliers competing in winning a solution deal (see section 5.6.1).

The failed interaction happens when providers realise that their investment in their resources such as the time spent on customer education activities and diagnosing customers' requirements is worthless (resources loss) as customers would award the deal to their close friends or relatives rather than to the merit of suppliers. Providers perceived this practice as unprofessional and unacceptable, causing a distressing experience and, therefore, leading to failed interaction.

Moreover, the study also offered evidence that customers' reliance on *wasta* practice when choosing their solution providers may jeopardise potential solutions outcomes (see section 5.6.1). Previous research stresses that customers should choose the supplier who demonstrates high competency to deliver effective solutions due to the perceived risk associated with the solution's impact on the customer's business processes and price premiums (Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011). Therefore, it can be argued that if Arabian business customers decide to give preference to their close friends and relatives over other decisive factors such as supplier experience and solutions outcomes, it is very likely that such customers may not obtain the best solution offerings, causing them to experience suboptimal value-in-use. This suboptimal value-in-use experience emerges when customers realise their purchased offerings are not the best due to choosing the wrong supplier resulting from their reliance on *wasta* practice.

6.6.2 *Unwillingness to share accurate information*

Another practice that leads to negative co-creation experiences and was reported by both supplier and customer firms is lack of directness and accuracy of the information shared during the co-creation activities. Extant solutions marketing research stresses that both solutions providers and customers are required to share detailed and accurate information during the co-creation to achieve effective dialogic communication and ensure solutions effectiveness (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Petri and Jacob, 2016). However, the research findings showed that Jordanian suppliers and their customers may not necessarily be direct and clear when integrating their resources during the co-creation (see section 5.6.2).

On one hand, providers perceive customers' unwillingness to share accurate information about their operant resources (e.g., budget, solution objectives) negatively as this hinders them from proposing the proper value proposition that fulfils their needs. As argued by Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola (2012), the supplier finds it impossible to deliver effective solutions without accurate information on the customer's budget and business context. On the other hand, the data also suggest that providers' lack of integrity of their input and information given to customers in relation to solutions transactions cause negative value co-creation experiences to be perceived by customers. This is a troubling finding because it makes both parties unable to trust each other due to lack of transparency during communication, causing distressing experiences to be perceived by them. This result reinforces previous research findings which suggest that value co-destruction may emerge as a result of absence of trust between the customer and supplier (Vafeas, Hughes and Hilton, 2016; Järvi, Kähkönen and Torvinen, 2018). Overall, It is difficult to explain this result, but it might be related to the theory of culture and communication which suggests communication styles are culturally sensitive (Hall, 1966). According to Feghali (1997), Arab people are often indirect in their communication and, thus, may not necessarily disclose their desired wants, needs and goals in their communications, especially if such disclosure may cause embarrassment or distress.

6.6.3 *Reluctance to adopt technology-based solutions*

Another practice which could lead to failed interaction and negative solutions outcomes is associated with customers' unwillingness to adopt technology-based solutions. Previous solutions marketing research has identified that customer adaptation to supplier solution is one of the most important practices that leads to solutions effectiveness (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007). The empirical data from the Jordanian market supports this result and argues that customers may not adopt technology-based solutions easily in their business process, resulting in failed interactions and negative co-creation experiences.

Data analysis showed that different members of the buying centre of the customer firms may have negative assumptions about technology-based solutions. Sections 5.3.3 and 5.6.3 showed that these negative assumptions are associated with the uncertainty that these solutions may bring to the customer's business. As a result, different members (e.g., decision-makers, users) of the buying team were found to engage in negative behaviours (Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010) to fight against such a solution and delay its implementation (see section 5.6.3).

These negative assumptions appeared to influence the co-creation at different points of the customer solution phases discussed earlier (see Figure 6.1). During the early co-creation process, for example, the customer's representative may fight against buying a system and suspect its value, thus leading to a failed interaction process among both parties. Alternatively, although the provider and customer may successfully initiate a solution co-creation, potential users of the customer firms may have negative assumptions towards these solutions and try to delay or fail its implementation at the deployment phase. Hence, it can be argued that such a practice causes negative co-creation experiences as it was found to cause unnecessary worry for the provider and thus jeopardise solutions implementation.

Negative assumptions held by Jordanian customers towards technology-based solutions could be attributed to the fact Arabian people are less likely to adopt new technological offerings as they bring more uncertainty and anxiety about the future (Hofstede; Hofstede, and Minkov, 2010).

6.6.4 *Lack of operant resources*

The S-D logic framework underlines the importance of operant resources such as skills and knowledge when the customer and provider engage in co-creation activities (Vargo and Lusch, 2004a, 2016). In the solutions co-creation process particularly, customers' input on their solutions needs, goals and budget is essential to ensure an effective value co-creation experience (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). However, customers may not necessarily articulate their needs and requirements to their solutions providers due to lack of expertise, making it hard for suppliers and customers to achieve effective co-creation experiences (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007).

The empirical evidence identifies that lack of customer experience prior to buying technology solution offerings can be detrimental to the co-creation experience. At the customer requirement definition phase, novice solutions customers may not trust their solutions providers' functional knowledge and skills by insisting on their technical requirements even though such requirements may not be necessary (see section 5.6.4). This is a troubling finding given that S-D logic proposes that "*skill(s) and knowledge is the fundamental unit of exchange*" (Vargo and Lusch, 2006, p. 44). Supplier interviewees indicated that inexperienced customers may undermine their knowledge and expertise, causing negative co-creation experiences which may influence their future relationship. As argued by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), if customers and providers are unequal partners in the co-creation, it is difficult to envisage effective dialogue among them.

In addition, at the deployment and post-deployment phase, lack of customer operant resource (expertise), was also found to cause suboptimal value-in-use as perceived by solutions providers and customers. If customers do not know how to manage the solution into their processes (misuse), the value in-use will be decreased (Plé and Chum-pitaz Cáceres (2010). Similarly, providers can also perceive negative value co-creation experiences if customers blame them for their own mistakes (solution mismanagement).

Overall these findings are in line with value co-destruction research which identifies resource deficiency as one of the major drivers of negative co-creation outcomes (Smith, 2013; Vafeas, Hughes and Hilton, 2016; Plé, 2017). Therefore, this study argues providers' investment in customer education activities (see section 6.3.1.1 above)

is essential to better support the co-creation possibilities, particularly when customers lack expertise that enables them to engage in value co-creation.

6.6.5 *Customers' failure to read solution contracts adequately*

In a solution relationship, it is common that the provider and customer review and change customer requirements as they go along at the customisation and implementation stages. Given that buying solution offerings involves taking a high degree of risk associated with delivery conditions and performance (Skarp and Gadde, 2008), it is important that customers show a high level of understanding to solutions contracts. However, the empirical findings from the ICT solutions sector identified that business buyers may not necessarily put a considerable amount of time and effort into reading the legal and business issues involved in the contract carefully (see section 5.6.5). This was found to cause dispute between the customer and provider throughout various phases of the co-creation, resulting in negative solutions outcomes.

This occurs when customers refuse to comply with what was indicated in the contract and transfer their roles and responsibilities to their suppliers due to lack of proper reading and understanding of these contracts. Previous research on value co-destruction delineates that falling into inappropriate practices by the customer or the provider leads to suboptimal value (e.g., Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010; Smith, 2013; Vafeas, Hughes and Hilton, 2016). In this study context, customers' failure to read solutions contracts thoroughly was perceived by provider firms as inappropriate practice that causes distressing experiences, leading to negative co-creation outcomes.

A possible explanation for why buyers of technology based solutions may not read and understand the contract carefully is because they find these contracts too technical and, thus, customers may not want to go in-depth into the solution agreements' details. Another possible alternative explanation for this finding could be related to the context where this study was carried out. Arab culture is considered to be a high context culture where the spoken words and relationships are greater than written words (Nelson, Batal and Bakary, 2002). Hence, customers may simply choose not to read contracts carefully and rely on their personal relationships and face-to-face communication to cope with escalation if it does emerge.

Interestingly, however, the study also suggests that providers can improve the customer's practices and processes (Payne, Storbacka and Frow, 2008) to ensure effective

understanding of solutions contracts. The practice highlighted by SP4 (see section 5.6.5) which describes how providers may challenge customers' understanding of solutions contrast, demonstrates how customer processes and practices can be improved to eliminate negative co-creation outcomes.

6.6.6 *Customer contact person-related issues*

Another inappropriate customer practice that leads to negative value co-creation experiences concerns customers' appointing the right function/department to coordinate and communicate with the solution provider. The data suggest that in the ICT solutions sector, customers may only assign software solutions to their IT departments to liaise with providers, assuming that this department is the most relevant for such a solution. However, the danger of this practice is that providers may not be able to have close communication and reach out to the other relevant functions of the customer firms. This was found to hinder providers from obtaining other relevant customer representatives' insights (see section 5.6.6). As a result, other relevant business functions of the customer firm and solution users may be ignored at the customisation phase. Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller (2011) argue that including users at the customisation and deployment level is essential as these people will employ the solution on a daily basis and, thus, they are interested in modifying and selecting products that fit into their working requirements.

If providers are not given access to relevant customer functions and users, providers experience negative co-creation experiences as this obstructs their work. In addition, customer users can also experience suboptimal value-in-use if they realise the solution does not fully cover their daily work requirements when it's implemented. Another related issue in the customer processes that leads to negative co-creation experiences perceived by the solution provider is supplier contactor instability. Solution providers found receiving comments and requests from more than one person from the customer firm at the development and customisation phases confusing.

6.6.7 *Providers' failure to meet solutions deadlines*

Taking the customer's point of view of what they perceived as inappropriate practice triggered by supplier firms, customer interviews highlighted that providers may fail to

deliver solutions on time. Prior research highlighted the importance of project management skills leveraged by solutions providers during co-creation (Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012). Specifically, time management skills are important as customers expect their solutions providers to reach goals according to a specified schedule (Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011). However, the data indicated that providers may not always be able to deliver their solutions on time for many reasons, leading to negative co-creation experiences perceived by their customers. These negative experiences occur when the customer realises that the provider is busy with many projects and, thus, they are unable to meet their solutions deadlines. Alternatively, providers may have poor internal managerial processes that affect their ability to proceed with solutions development and implementation on time. For instance, the bureaucracy and long managerial process followed in some large supplier firms as highlighted by SP10 (see section, 5.6) can also create negative friction between providers' representatives who are in regular contact with the customer firm representative. Hence, this result supports the previous research (Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011) which emphasises the importance of aligning all functions together of the supplier firm to ensure cooperation among all departments and, thus, deliver effective solutions.

In summary, previous discussion outlined a range of customer and provider practices that lead to negative co-creation outcomes perceived by either one or both parties in the ICT sector solution exchanges. These practices appeared to influence the customer solutions process at various points. Furthermore, these practices were a mix of culturally driven aspects embedded in an Arabian context and universally applicable behaviours (see Figure 6.3). More importantly, different people from different customer and provider firms may perceive the failed interaction and negative co-creation experiences differently in the solution context. This is due to the high number of people who are involved in solutions exchanges from both parties at various phases (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011). This is an important finding that adds to the current sparse research on the value co-destruction notion by predicting that co-destruction can occur in a complex, concurrent and iterative fashion within B2B customer solutions context.

Overall, the findings strongly confirm the emerging trend that suggests value co-creation research should include the co-destruction aspect as both notions tend to occur

simultaneously (e.g., Prior and Marcos-cuevas, 2016; Vafeas, Hughes and Hilton, 2016; Plé, 2017). Jordanian providers and customers expressed their positive and negative experiences together in an iterative style during the interactive process. Collectively, these practices perhaps explain why solutions projects in the ICT sector may turn into a black hole prior to completion (Keil and Mähring, 2010). Figure 6.4 summarises customers' and providers' practices that lead to the experience of suboptimal value, applying them in respect to the well known co-creation phases of customer solutions. What stands out in this figure is the co-existence of both value co-creation and value diminuation drivers in the ICT sector solutions context. As argued by Prior and Marcos-Cuevas (2016, p. 547) "*if value co-creation occurs, this does not preclude value co-destruction*".

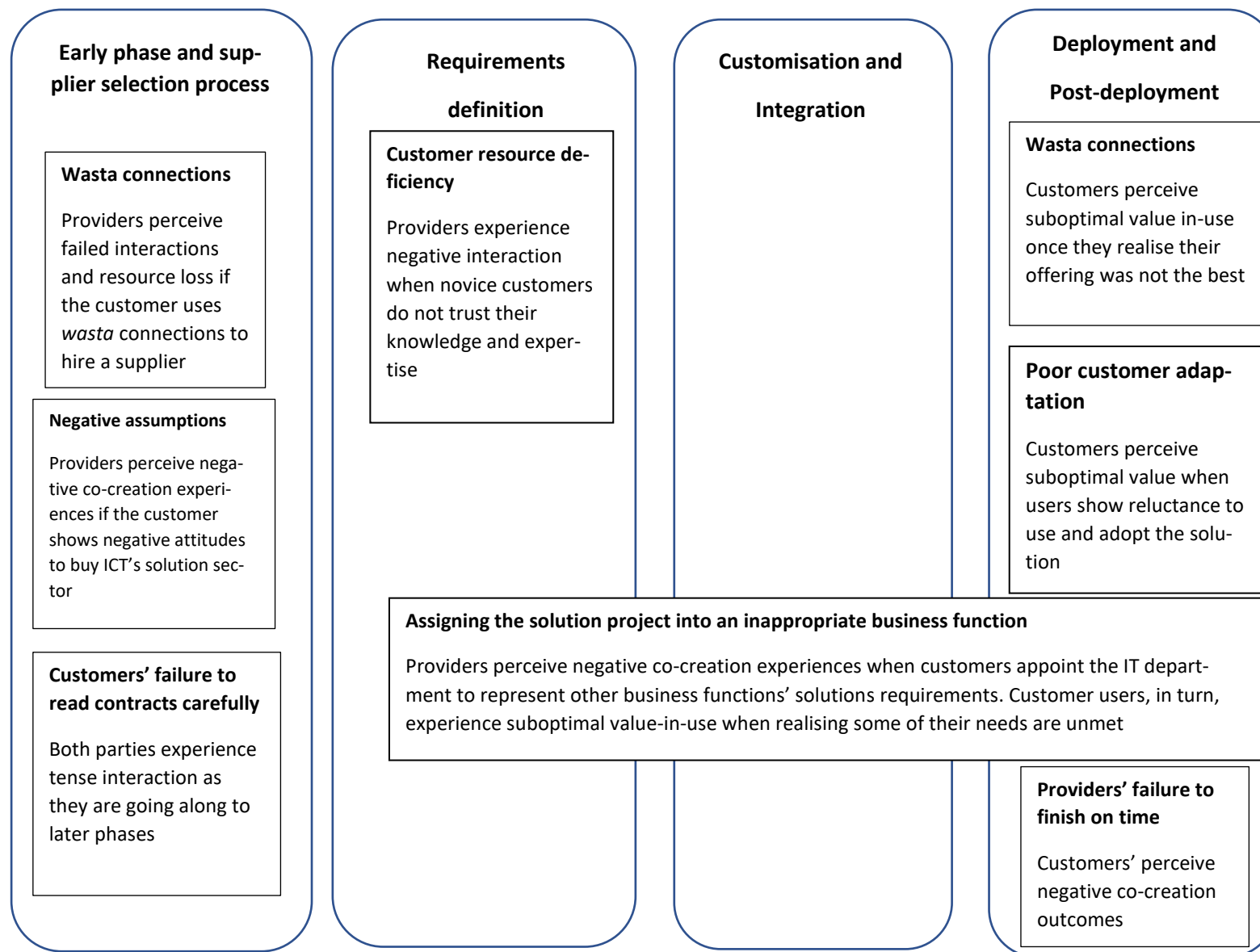


Figure 6.4: Identified customer and provider practices that lead to negative co-creation experiences in the Jordanian's ICT solution sector

6.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the empirical findings generated by Jordanian providers' and customers' participants involved in solutions co-creation process in the context of extant literature. The purpose was to adapt and extend the theoretical work of solutions marketing studies within four major themes based on analysis of the empirical findings. First, the well-known customer solutions conceptualisation model was extended in an LCRM solutions context. As a result, the market development phase, as an early value co-creation process, was added to increase customer readiness to operate within the ICT solutions market. Specifically, four distinct but complementary providers' roles to support the customer value creation process were proposed during the co-creation phases. Second, the empirical findings highlighted the great relevance of adopting a multiple solution value propositions approach in the ICT solutions sector and determined its impact on the co-creation activities.

Third, the empirical findings also provided insights into the impact of business cultural issues from an Arabian context on solutions value co-creation phases. Fourth, the empirical findings, also from a dyadic perspective, outlined some providers' and customers' practices that may destroy value co-creation experiences, integrating the limited B2B value co-destruction research within the solutions value co-creation phases. Figure 6.5, provides a diagrammatical illustration of the major four themes based on the empirical findings discussed in this thesis.

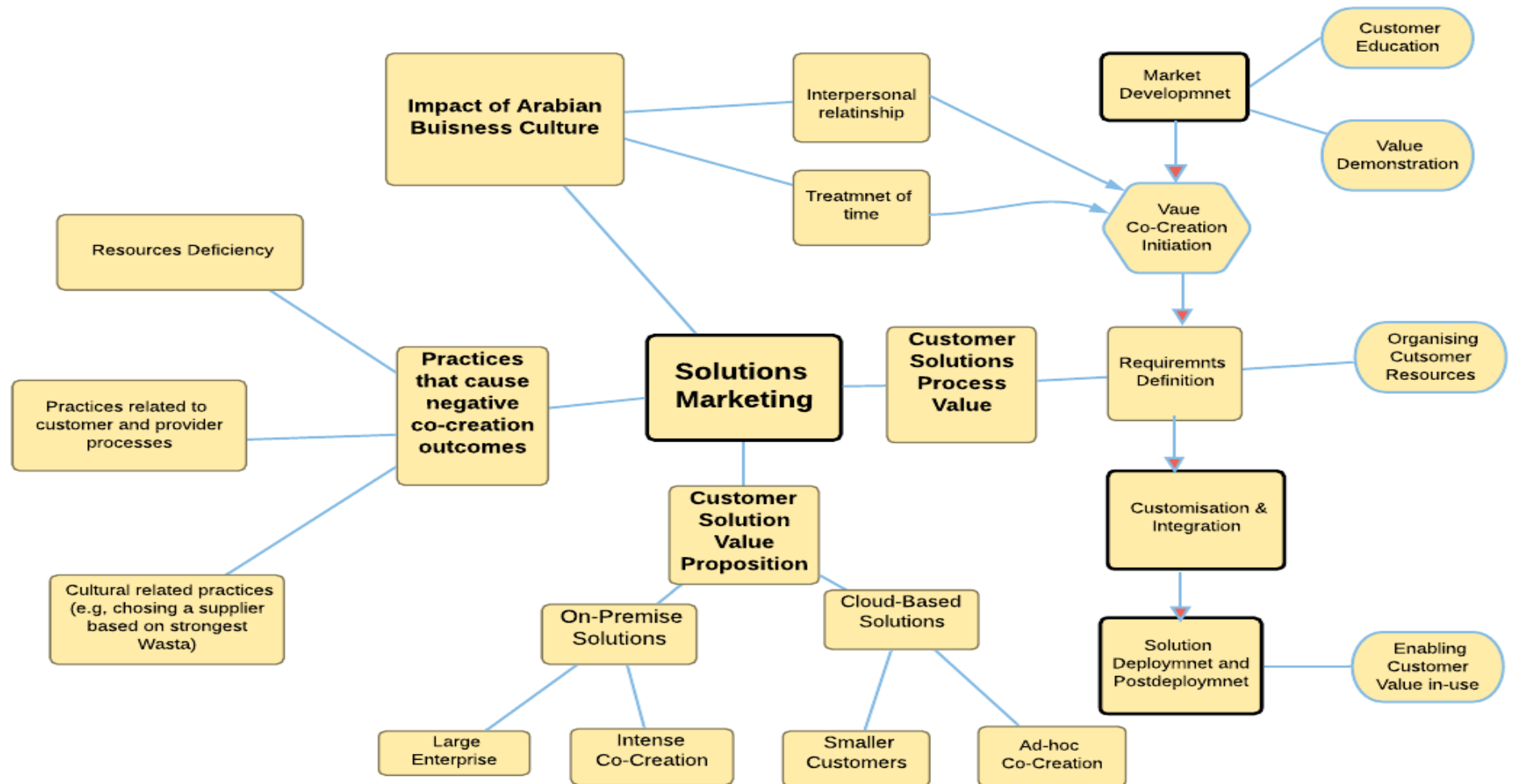


Figure 6.5: Diagrammatical illustration of findings

Chapter 7: Conclusions

This study has focused on understanding the value co-creation trajectories of S-D logic of marketing within the context of B2B customer solutions in a low customer readiness market. This chapter reviews the research questions based on the empirical data that emerged from customers' and suppliers' interviews. It also presents the theoretical contribution the study makes to value co-creation trajectories within customer solutions research. This chapter also proposes some managerial implications which serve as a guidance for solutions customers and providers within the ICT solutions sector. The chapter then concludes by highlighting the study's limitations, suggesting avenues for future research.

7.1 Review of Aim and Research Questions

The primary focus of this study was to investigate value co-creation trajectories within the B2B customer solutions context in less mature solutions markets. The study drew on the theoretical development of the S-D logic of marketing which served as the main theoretical lens of this study. It responds to a lack of research on the solutions marketing field particularly the collaborative process embedded in solutions exchanges. The study primarily focused on four main theoretical gaps that concern value co-creation trajectories in the domain of customer solutions. These gaps were translated into four main research questions which this study attempted to answer. The following subsections review how these questions were answered based on the empirical data from suppliers' and customers' interviews from the Jordanian ICT solutions sector.

7.1.1 *Research Question One*

“What influence, if any, does low customer readiness in solutions markets have on the role of the provider in the solutions value co-creation process?”

The first research question aimed to identify solutions providers' roles in solutions value co-creation activities to support the customer value creation process in an LCRM. The need to answer this question stems from the predominant assumption in the previous research that customers have high solutions readiness where they are able to identify their solution objectives and scopes, apply their resources and perform their

roles in the co-creation activity and adopt the solution value-in-use effectively. Therefore, the study challenges this assumption and investigates co-creation activities in the Jordanian context where business buyers were found to have less readiness and ability to perform their roles and apply their resources effectively in the co-creation. Hence, answering this question becomes increasingly important because the current theory suggests that creating effective customer solutions depends largely on customers' ability and readiness to contribute to their resources and perform their roles in the value co-creation process (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016).

The empirical data from the Jordanian ICT solutions sector confirmed the characteristics of customer who may have low solutions readiness, as identified in previous research (e.g., Storbacka and Pennanen, 2014). At the early phase of the customer solutions process, Jordanian buyers appeared to emphasise value-in-exchange, such as the solutions price, over the value that can be achieved from the solution (value-in-use) when they make their solutions buying decisions. Further, the political instability surrounding Jordan and lack of awareness of solutions value came into play and had an impact on customers' willingness to invest in solutions buying and approach their solutions providers. At the requirements definition, customers were also found to be unclear about their resources such as solutions objective, timeline and budget. Finally, at the implementation and post-deployment phase customers were found unable to effectively utilise solutions value-in-use on their own. Suppliers' participants in this study emphasised that they were leading and developing the market by performing various roles at different phases of the co-creation in order to provide support for a better co-creation. These roles were termed as the solutions knowledge provider, value demonstrator, customer resources organiser and value-in-use enabler, respectively. Finally, these roles appeared to manifest before, during and after solutions implementation. Figure 6.1 illustrates how these roles span the co-creation phases of customer solutions.

7.1.2 Research Question Two

“How does adopting a multiple solution value proposition approach influence value communication and the co-creation activity?”

The second research question was formulated due to the lack of research into how solutions providers communicate the value of their solutions offerings to their business

customers. This gap is resulting from the predominant focus on the linear collaborating process embedded in developing and implementing customer solutions. Although solutions marketing scholars do not explicitly mention the customer value proposition in their discourse, extant research tends to associate a customer solution value proposition with complex offerings that involves an intense value co-creation interactive process (e.g., Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012) by focusing on solutions offered to large business customers (e.g., Petri and Jacob, 2016). However, recent conceptual work on the customer value proposition has suggested that solutions providers are required to adopt a multiple solutions value proposition approach (Eggert *et al.*, 2018) because customers not only want complex and highly customised offerings but, also, solutions that are most pertinent to their needs. As a result, the question that remains is how offering multiple solutions value propositions affect how value is communicated to different business customers and affect the co-creation process.

The ICT solutions sector served as an excellent context to answer this question given that the wide range of technology-based solutions originated in this sector. This question was answered by urging providers to give more details about different types of solutions offerings and how these offerings are communicated to their business customers. Also, this question was answered by conducting interviews with different types of customer firms (e.g., large and small) that purchased technology-based solutions offerings to obtain their views about their business drivers and their usage context for these offerings. Most supplier firms offered two types of customer solutions value propositions. First, the strategic customer solution value proposition was mainly communicated to large business customers. This type of customer value proposition was largely linked to complex and on-premise technology-based offerings where customers needed a high level of data security and has high demand for server capacity. Due to the complexity embedded in these types of offerings together with customers' sophisticated needs and their business drivers, providers had to adopt a strategic selling approach by focusing on the long-term solutions outcomes (value in-use) when communicating the value of these types of offerings.

In contrast, the second value proposition approach, followed by the same solutions providers, was transactional which was associated with offering less complex (e.g., cloud-based) offerings to smaller customers. Due to the small size of these customers, and financial limitations, adopting transactional selling approach that responds to their

short objectives and their basic need to technology, was more appropriate to communicate the value of these offerings to such customers. Table 6.1 makes a distinction between these two types of customer value propositions offered in the ICT sector.

7.1.3 Research Question Three

“How does an Arabian business culture impact the solutions value co-creation process?”

Powers et al., (2016) posit a need to investigate the impact of cultural contexts on the value co-creation phases of customer solutions. Hence, this question investigated the influence of Arabian business culture on the customer solutions process. The impetus behind focusing on an Arabian business context stemmed from the conclusions drawn from international business and marketing research which establishes that Arabian buyers' and suppliers' business relationships and practices differ from those established in western contexts. This difference is due to the unique social and cultural context of Arabian countries (Hutchings and Weir, 2006; Berger et al., 2015). Arab countries are collective societies with high context cultures that are driven by social networks and relationships (Hofstede, 1991).

The question was answered by urging participants to describe how cultural issues may impact the collaborative process in solutions exchange. The answer primarily involved three issues pertinent to Arabian business culture that influence value co-creation initiation. The first issue highlighted the impact of interpersonal connections and “*wasta*” practice at the early co-creation phases. The second issue highlighted buyers' treatment of time during the negotiation and explained how Jordanian customers take excessive time at the negotiating phase before closing a solution agreement. Particularly, Jordanian buyers were found to use time as a resource to increase their bargaining power by negotiating with more than provider simultaneously and press for further price reductions. Hence, providers' ability to be patient and manage the polychronic time approach followed in this market served as a strategic sales capability to enable solution co-creation initiation. Third, another business procedure welcomed by customers in this Arabian market which can also be seen a useful approach to close a solution deal with key customers is the involvement of the senior executives of the supplier firm. This practice was highly valued by customer firms who felt more appreciated and that their businesses were well-looked after. Taken together, these points

are pertinent to the impact of Arabian business culture on the customer solutions process and have expanded our understanding on how solutions value co-creation may emerge in an Arabian context (see Figure 6.2).

7.1.4 Research Question Four

“What provider and customer practices lead to destroying value co-creation experiences in solution exchanges?”

The vast majority of value co-creation scholars have investigated the positive side of value co-creation experiences in their discourse. However, the tendency to focus on pleasant value co-creation experiences has been challenged recently by evolving the thought of value co-destruction of the S-D logic of marketing (e.g., Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010; Smith, 2013). Value co-destruction research emerged to highlight the adverse consequences, or the negative practices perceived by customers or/and service providers during the co-creation process. In customer solutions, particularly, while solutions marketing scholars have pointed out that solutions co-creation activities are fraught with many challenges (e.g., Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Sjödin, Parida and Wincent, 2016) that may hinder delivering effective customer solutions, this research remains largely within the domain of positive collaborative solutions process. Therefore, the fourth research question was formulated to integrate the co-destruction research theme into the complex practice of B2B solutions exchanges.

The question was answered by instructing customer and provider participants to reflect on their experiences about the challenges and problems experienced by them or their parties throughout the co-creation phases that led to unpleasant co-creation experiences. This resulted in revealing some practices which left providers and customers feeling disappointed during engaging in co-creation activities. Overall, the findings from the Jordanian ICT solutions sector reported various customer and provider practices including issues related to providers' failure to deliver their solutions on time, poor adoption to technology-based solutions offerings, lack of operant resources, failure to understand solutions contracts adequately, customer contact person-related issues and cultural rooted practices.

7.2 Contribution to Knowledge

The qualitative nature of this research has enabled the researcher to gain detailed insights into the customer and provider activities embedded in the co-creation process

when buying and marketing customer solutions in an LCRM. This study makes theoretical and managerial contributions to the scholarship in the field of B2B solutions marketing research, value co-destruction and business relationships in the Arab world. The nature of each contribution is outlined below.

7.2.1 *Contribution to Theory*

The lack of research on customer solutions in low customer readiness markets (LCRMs) has inspired the theoretical contribution of this thesis. While extant research agrees that creating effective customer solutions is dependent, largely, upon customer readiness and ability to effectively apply their resources and perform their roles in the co-creation process (Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012; Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson, 2016; Petri and Jacob, 2016) these studies have largely drawn on conclusions from high customer readiness solutions markets (HCRMs). The study contributes to this stream of research by investigating customers' and providers' co-creation activities when engaging in solutions exchanges in an LCRM. Specifically, the study extends the current well known solutions framework (e.g., Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011; Petri and Jacob, 2016) by proposing the market development phase (see Figure 6.1) that precedes the signalling activity to indicate providers' leadership through developing solutions markets. This phase was added to compensate the lack of customer readiness to effectively operate within the solutions market at an early phase of the co-creation.

In addition, four distinct but complementary supplier roles were proposed to support customer processes and resources throughout the co-creation phases. These roles are identified as solutions knowledge provider, value demonstrator, customer resource organiser, and value-in-use enabler respectively. This finding is different from previous results in that, rather than viewing customers and providers as equal partners when performing their roles in co-creation in HCRMs (e.g., Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola, 2012), this study has shown that providers are dominators and customers are followers in LCRMs. This finding is important to the S-D framework because it elaborates further on the seventh foundational premises (FP7) that posits that the providers' role is to offer value proposition during the co-creation. However, the study posits that in markets where customers lack knowledge and skills, and largely driven by short-term

orientations (e.g., solution price), it is imperative that providers need to support customers' processes and resources in the co-creation. Hence, the study has empirically shown that the providers' role in the low customer readiness solutions market goes beyond only offering value propositions to provide support for better co-creation through influencing customers' resources, processes and value-in-use (Gronroos, 2011; Grönroos and Voima, 2013).

The thesis also makes a contribution by offering an empirical demonstration towards a multiple customer solution value proposition approach in the ICT sector, thus extending the current conceptual academic work proposed by Eggert and his colleagues (2019). Extant solutions marketing research (e.g., Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007; Töllner, Blut and Holzmüller, 2011; Petri and Jacob, 2016) tends to focus largely on the linear collaborative process of customer solutions without offering sufficient insights into how solutions offerings are communicated into different types of business customers in different industries. This has resulted in a homogenous view of the customer solutions value proposition that is characterised with highly complex offerings that involve intense co-creation activities.

This study has suggested that adopting a multiple customer solutions value proposition approach is an important strategic option for solutions providers in the ICT sector to succeed in solutions markets. Particularly, the study has shown that providers need to use a combination of a strategic and transactional approach when communicating the value of their offerings to their business customers. This finding provides strong empirical confirmation that customers may not necessarily be looking at outcome-driven solutions contracts (e.g., Kowalkowski, 2011) and, therefore, adopting a transactional value proposition approach is more appropriate with this type of customer. For example, smaller customers expect their suppliers to come up with solutions that best match their needs (e.g., cloud-based solutions) and budgets (e.g., per-pay-use offerings). This had an implication on the type and amount of resources developed and contributed by providers when communicating multiple customer solutions value propositions (see Table 6.1). Overall, this finding, concerning a multiple approach for the customer value proposition associated with solutions offerings originated in the ICT sector, responds to Nordin and Kowalkowski's (2010, p.454) call for distinguishing between different types of solutions offerings in different markets and industries.

Another theoretical contribution relates to the impact of business culture on value co-creation activities within B2B customer solutions. The findings of earlier studies have

generally established the need to extend customer solutions research in different and unique cultural business contexts to identify the impact of business culture on the customer solutions process (Powers, Sheng and Juan, 2016; Sjödin, Parida and Wincent, 2016). The Arabian business context was particularly chosen to fill this gap due to the uniqueness of its social and cultural composition and its attraction to international firms through offering them lucrative business opportunities (Berger et al., 2015).

Aspects such as interpersonal relationships and *wasta* connections, the use of time by Arab buyers and the role of senior management of supplier firms were found to affect how Jordanian providers and customers apply their resources in the co-creation of customer solutions. Although S-D logic recognises the effect of actors' traditional norms, values and behaviours on the value co-creation process (Chan et al., 2010; Edvardsson, Tronvoll and Gruber, 2011), this remains largely at a rather theoretical level. Hence, this study has provided empirical support to this conceptual inference and elaborated, further, how this influences customers' and suppliers' interactions within B2B customer solutions research (see Figure 6.2).

This research also contributes to extant literature on Arabian business relationships through challenging the notion that Arabian buyers' preference to award their business deals to their close friends or relatives (e.g., Hutchings and Weir, 2006; Berger *et al.*, 2015) will sustain as a taken for granted practice. While the study showed that Jordanian customers may still follow such a practice, the findings provide anecdotal evidence where there is a growing trend among Jordanian buyers to follow a transparent buying process and award their high value solutions to the right suppliers. Hence, the study argues in a customer solutions context, Arab buyers tend to rely less on *wasta* connections when choosing their suppliers due to the price premium they pay for customisation and risks (e.g., solutions delivery and performance) involved in buying these solutions.

Finally, the study makes a contribution by adding to a growing body of literature on the negative side of value co-creation (e.g., Prior and Marcos-cuevas, 2016; Vafeas, Hughes and Hilton, 2016; Plé, 2017). The thesis applies the co-destruction notion into the core practice of value co-creation within customer solutions. Applying this thought into a B2B customer solution context, contributes to the solution co-creation literature, and value co-destruction research specifically.

On one hand, the study adds to customer solutions research by identifying some customers' and suppliers' practices that lead to failed interactive processes and perceiving negative co-creation experiences. Aarikka-Stenroos and Jaakkola (2012) emphasise that disagreements and conflicts are likely to arise when providers and customers engage in solutions exchanges due to the intensity that shapes the collaborative process. Macdonald, Kleinaltenkamp and Wilson (2016) point out that identifying and addressing practices that cause negative consequences in different business contexts are imperative as ignoring them may lead to solutions failure. Hence, this study identifies some providers' and customers' practices that are perceived negatively during the co-creation which may threaten achieving effective solution implementation (see Figure 6.4). While a few of these practices were attributed to cultural aspects pertinent to the Arabian context, the relevance of these practices in the ICT solutions sector in other markets is highly applicable. For instance, the reluctance toward adopting technology-based solutions and lack of customers' expertise when buying ICT sector products and services may hold in other market contexts (e.g., Tuli, Kohli and Bharadwaj, 2007).

On the other hand, the thesis makes a contribution to the emerging value co-destruction research stream. While the findings support previous conceptualisations that suggest value co-destruction takes place due to resource deficiency (e.g., lack of skills and knowledge) or/and resource misuse (e.g., failure to understand solution agreement) (e.g., Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010; Vafeas, Hughes and Hilton, 2016), the study extends this framework by arguing that cultural practices can also cause suboptimal value perceived by either one or both parties involved in the co-creation. For instance, customers' practice represented by following a non-transparent process when selecting suppliers (e.g., relying on *Wasta*) and customer and provider unwillingness to share accurate information during co-creation were largely culturally-driven practices that were perceived negatively by both parties.

7.2.2 Contribution to Practice

During the data collection phase, Jordanian customers and providers expressed their interest in being informed about the results of this study. Hence, it seems appropriate to highlight some practical recommendations to managers in terms of managing the collaborative process in the Jordanian ICT solutions sector. These implications should be relevant for both Jordanian/Arabian and non-Arabian solutions practitioners operating in the ICT sector.

At the early phase of solution co-creation, rather than focusing only on the solution price, customers should emphasise the added value and solutions outcomes that they will gain from the solution's use. This is important as considering only the cost of the solution in the short term may drive customers to buy inferior and low-quality solutions.

In addition, the study raised the point that customer users may not necessarily be involved at the customisation level when buying technology-based solutions. In particular, buyers may assume that buying these solutions is a responsibility of the IT function of their firm, prompting them to exclude users during the collaborative process. However, it was evident that this left users' specific requirements unmet and influenced their adoption of the solution. Therefore, the decision-makers of buying firms need to enable suppliers to work closely with solution users to ensure implementing effective solutions.

Moreover, the study found that business customers may not thoroughly read and understand the IT solutions contract. This particular research finding points to the need for customers to understand the business and legal issues involved in such contracts and have some awareness of the effect of the contract terms on the long-term relationship with providers. Another important managerial implication concerns customers' and providers' attitudes toward sharing accurate information in the resource integration process. It was found that business customers and buyers may hide some relevant information about their resources and processes during the resource integration process. This evidently caused tension among both parties and affected providers' ability to craft the best solutions value propositions. Therefore, managers of both sides of the dyad are strongly recommended to exchange accurate and clear information in order to ensure successful outcomes for both parties.

Furthermore, another implication that concerns all solutions providers operating within the ICT solutions sector is related to creating solutions leads. The study established that the market development activity is of great relevance to high tech and new solutions offerings. Consequently, solutions providers are advised to proactively engage in an educational activity with their business customers to build their knowledge about these solutions and their value. This is because customers may not be aware of these solutions and, thus, adopting such a proactive approach is seen as an enabler to create solutions leads.

Finally, although the study was conducted in an Arab context, it also offers important managerial implications for international solutions providers operating in Jordan and Arabian markets. First, it was indicated that Jordanian customers took an excessive amount of time during the early customer solutions process before they made their solution decision. Hence, international firms offering solutions in Jordan and other Arabian countries should be patient and manage the polychronic time followed by customers before closing any solution deal. Second, non-Arab solutions providers are also required to invest much of their resources (time and effort) to develop strong interpersonal relationships before initiating co-creation. Such personal relationships serve as important resources for providers to generate a solution lead and gain access to customer firms. The study showed, unlike western markets where providers' competencies and solutions knowledge enable them to initiate a solution relationship, Jordanian/Arabian business customers consider other important aspects including personal relationships and the involvement of the senior executives of the supplier firm during the negotiation. Hence, building such resources for international firms in Arabian markets serves as an enabler to co-create value and initiate a solution relationship.

For Arab buyers, generally, another important practical implication is related to how buyers select their solutions providers. Although many Jordanian buyers interviewed in this study expressed their views about the importance of following a transparent supplier selection process, there seems to be evidence that some customers may still favour their close friends and relatives, thus awarding them their solutions deals (*wasta*). This practice, however, proved that customers may end up with an unpleasant experience as customers may realise, later, that their solution offering was not the best. Hence, Jordanian (Arabian) business customers are advised to follow a transparent and thorough supplier evaluation process when choosing their solutions providers.

Having outlined the research contribution to knowledge and offered some managerial recommendations for provider and customer managers, the next section acknowledges the limitation of this study.

7.3 Research Limitations

As with any piece of research, the study is subject to several limitations. The first limitation is related to the sample size where only 44 interviews were conducted with

provider and customer firms' representatives. This was due to the time and financial constraints where the research was based in the UK while, in conducting the research, the researcher had to travel to Jordan to collect data. Nonetheless, as highlighted in chapter 4 (see section 4.8.3), the interviewing process stopped at this sample size when theoretical saturation was achieved.

The second limitation relates to the qualitative nature of this research and the role of the researcher. As the researcher is seen as an instrument in the research process, his beliefs and experiences could have influenced how data were collected and interpreted as he had previously worked in selling telecom products and solutions in the Jordanian market. Chapter 4 explained how the researcher was conscious about this point to minimise such bias in this study. For example, the researcher sought elaboration of meaning and issues directly from interviewed participants by using probing questions (see section 4.8.3). It could be argued, however, that the researcher's previous work in the Jordanian ICT sector should be seen as an advantage as it enabled him to gain better access to the senior managers operating in this sector.

The third limitation concerns the scope of this study in low customer readiness markets. Geographically, this dissertation has focused only on Jordan as an LCRM and, thus, the study's generalisability is questionable. Jordan proved to be different economically, politically and culturally from the western context and this may apply to other non-western and LCRMs. Also the focus on solutions marketing activities within the ICT sector limits the generalisability of findings when applied to other sectors in Jordan.

Another important limitation concerns that the scope is related to the industry on which this study focused. The study has focused only on customer readiness when buying and using solutions originated in the ICT solutions sector. However, ICT solutions are high-tech which may limit customers' ability to define their solution scope. Hence, caution is advised before generalising the results of this sector to other industries. Nevertheless, it can be argued that focusing on this sector enabled the researcher to delineate important insights pertinent to solutions originated in this sector.

Having acknowledged the research limitations within this study, the following section suggests further avenues for future research.

7.4 Future Research

This study investigated value co-creation trajectories within B2B customer solutions in a low customer readiness market. The study has demonstrated the importance of understanding solutions marketing research from a wider perspective. Such a perspective integrated thoughts of value co-creation, co-destruction, customer solution value proposition and the influence of business culture. This interplay enriched our knowledge about the high connectedness between these aspects when applied in solutions marketing research. Hence, this study offers a number of research areas within these themes that require further investigation.

First, the study proposed four distinct, but complementary roles performed by the provider to support the customer value creation process in the ICT solutions sector. This result may not be applicable in other solutions sectors and, hence, further research is needed to understand how different types of solutions manifest in different roles in the co-creation phases.

Another fruitful area for research is customer solutions at a different level of granularity. The findings showed that adopting multiple solutions value propositions in the ICT solutions sector is of great relevance. It was found that smaller customers demanded more practical solutions that fit with their resources and processes. Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate how solutions providers in other industries consider multiple customer solutions value propositions and how these value propositions are communicated to different business firms.

Moreover, in a striking contrast with previous findings that suggest Arab buyers' decisions are largely influenced by *wasta* connections, the study provided an evidence where Jordanian customers may not necessarily choose the strongest *wasta* when purchasing solution offerings. This contradictory result raises the point that the use of *wasta* may vary depending on how complex and expensive the offering as perceived by Arabian customers. Hence, future studies may benefit from considering the type of purchased offering to understand to what extent *wasta* may dominate in different buying contexts.

Another promising area for research is the value co-destruction area. This study aimed at identifying provider and customer practices that lead to negative co-creation experiences in the ICT solutions sector. Given that value co-destruction research is still

nascent, future research should extend these findings into other sectors and delineate how such practices can be avoided and handled. Also, the study aimed at identifying customer and provider practices from a dyadic perspective. Hence, it would be interesting to explore value co-destruction thought at the network level to gain more in-depth understanding of this phenomenon at multiple levels. Future research should also examine how different business cultures may also cause co-destruction experiences.

Finally, given the scarcity of research on the impact of cultural issues on the customer solution process, examining the uniqueness of other social and cultural contexts may reveal other interesting findings. For instance, although Chinese business culture has similar rules of business to the Arab context, which is embedded in building strong connections before undertaking business (Berger et al., 2015), examining the influence of the Chinese context may reveal different insights towards the resource integration process than what was followed in the Jordanian market.

7.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the four research questions of this study. Subsequently, the chapter outlined the contribution of the thesis to knowledge by highlighting its theoretical, methodological and managerial implications. This chapter also offered a number of recommendations to solutions practitioners in the ICT solutions sector and the international solutions providers operating or wishing to provide solutions in an Arab context. Next, the study's limitations were highlighted and, finally, the thesis suggested some areas that future research should address.

References

- Aarikka-Stenroos, L. and Jaakkola, E. (2012). Value co-creation in knowledge intensive business services: A dyadic perspective on the joint problem solving process. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 41(1), pp. 15–26.
- Abosag, I. and Lee, J. (2013). The formation of trust and commitment in business relationships in the Middle East : Understanding Et-Moone relationships. *International Business Review*, 22(3), pp. 602–614.
- Abuznaid, S. and Weir, D. (2011). Leadership in Jordanain organizations: how does it differ from leadership in westren organizatins?’, in *Leadership development in the middle east*. pp. 127–225. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Al-Amer, R., Ramjan, L., Glew, P., Darwish, M. and Salamonson, Y., 2016. Language translation challenges with Arabic speakers participating in qualitative research studies. *International journal of nursing studies*, 54, pp.150-157.
- Al-Jaghoub, S. and Westrup, C. (2003). Jordan and ICT-led development: towards a competition state?. *Information Technology & People*, 16(1), pp. 93–110.
- ALHussan, F. B., AL-Husan, F. B. and Alhesan, L. (2017). The role of senior executives in managing key customers in Arab context. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 32(6), pp. 825–835.
- Anderson, J.C. and Narus, J. A. (1995). Capturing the Value of Supplementary Services. *Harvard Business Review*, 73(1), pp. 75–83.
- Anderson, J.C. and Narus, J. A (1998). Business Marketing: Understand Whan Customers Value. *Harvard Business Review*, 76(6), pp. 53–65.
- Anderson, J.C. and Wynstra, F., 2010. Purchasing higher-value, higher-price offerings in business markets. *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*, 17(1), pp.29-61.
- Arnould, E., Price, L. and Moisio, R. (2006). Making Contexts Matter: Selecting Research Contexts for Theoretical Insights, in *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Marketing*. pp. 106–125 Northampton, USA: Edward Elgar.
- Baines, T., Ziaee Bigdeli, A., Bustinza, O. F., Shi, V.G., Baldwin, J. and Ridgway, K. (2017). Servitization: revisiting the state-of-the-art and research priorities. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 37(2), pp. 256–278.

- Ballantyne, D., Frow, P., Varey, R. J. and Payne, A. (2011). Value propositions as communication practice: Taking a wider view. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 40(2), pp. 202–210.
- Ballantyne, D. and Varey, R.J., 2006. Creating value-in-use through marketing interaction: the exchange logic of relating, communicating and knowing. *Marketing theory*, 6(3), pp.335-348.
- Bazeley, P. and Jackson, K. eds., 2013. *Qualitative data analysis with NVivo*. Sage Publications Limited.
- Bell, S.J., Auh, S. and Eisingerich, A.B., 2017. Unraveling the customer education paradox: When, and how, should firms educate their customers?. *Journal of Service Research*, 20(3), pp.306-321.
- Bell, S.J. and Eisingerich, A.B., 2007. The paradox of customer education: Customer expertise and loyalty in the financial services industry. *European Journal of Marketing*, 41(5/6), pp.466-486.
- Berger, R., Herstein, R., Silbiger, A. and Barnes, B. R. (2017). Is guanxi universal in China? Some evidence of a paradoxical shift. *Journal of Business Research*, 86 pp. 1–12.
- Berger, R., Silbiger, A., Herstein, R. and Barnes, B. R. (2015). Analyzing business-to-business relationships in an Arab context. *Journal of World Business*, 50(3), pp. 454–464.
- Berghman, L., Matthyssens, P. and Vandenbempt, K. (2006). Building competences for new customer value creation: An exploratory study. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 35(8), pp. 961–973.
- Bernard, H.R. and Ryan, G.W., 2010. *Analyzing qualitative data: Systematic approaches*. SAGE publications.
- Bettencourt, L.A., Ostrom, A.L., Brown, S.W. and Roundtree, R.I., 2002. Client co-production in knowledge-intensive business services. *California management review*, 44(4), pp.100-1
- Bhutta, K. S. and Huq, F. (2002). Supplier selection problem: A comparison of the total cost of ownership and analytic hierarchy process approaches. *Supply Chain Management*, 7(3), pp. 126–135.

- Biggemann, S., Kowalkowski, C., Maley, J. and Brege, S. (2013). Development and implementation of customer solutions: A study of process dynamics and market shaping. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 42(7), pp. 1083–1092.
- Bonnemeier, S., Burianek, F. and Reichwald, R. (2010). Revenue models for integrated customer solutions: Concept and organizational implementation. *Journal of Revenue and Pricing Management*, 9(3), pp. 228–238.
- Brady, M. K. and Cronin, J. J. J. (2001). Some new thoughts on conceptualizing perceived service quality: a hierarchical approach. *Journal of Marketing*, 65(3), pp. 34–49.
- Brady, T., Davies, A. and Gann, D. (2005). Creating value by delivering integrated solutions. *International Journal of Project Management*, 23(5), pp. 360–365.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77–101.
- Brax, S. A. and Jonsson, K. (2009). Developing integrated solution offerings for remote diagnostics: A comparative case study of two manufacturers. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 29(5), pp. 539–560.
- Brett, J. M. and Gelfand, M. J. (2005). A cultural analysis of the underlying assumptions of negotiation theory', in *Negotiation theory and research* pp. 173–202. Psychology Press.
- Brooks, J., McCluskey, S., Turley, E. and King, N., 2015. The utility of template analysis in qualitative psychology research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 12(2), pp.202-222.
- Bryman, A. (2015) *Social research methods*. 2015th edn. Oxford university press.
- Cappelli, P. and Sherer, P. (1991). The missing role in context in OB: The need for a meso-level approach. *Research in organizational behaviour*, 13, pp. 55-110.
- Carson, D., Gilmore, A., Perry, C. and Gronhaug, K., 2001. *Qualitative marketing research*. Sage.
- Ceci, F. and Masini, A. (2011). Balancing specialized and generic capabilities in the provision of integrated solutions. *Industrial and Corporate Change*, 20(1), pp. 91–131.
- Ceci, F. and Prencipe, A. (2008). Configuring capabilities for integrated solutions: Evidence from the IT sector. *Industry & Innovation*, 15(3), pp. 277–296.

- Central Intelligence Agency (2019), Available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html> [Accessed: 1st June 2019].
- Chan, K. W., Kin, C., Yim, B. and Lam, S. S. K. (2010). Is Customer Participation in Value Creation a Double-Edged Sword ? Evidence from Professional Financial. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(3), pp. 48–64.
- Chandler, J. and Vargo, S. (2011). Contextualization and value-in-context: How context frames exchange. *Marketing Theory*, 11(1), pp. 35–49.
- Collis, J. and Hussey, R. (2009). *Business research: A practical guide for undergraduate and postgraduate students*. Third Edition. Macmillan International Higher Education.
- Corbin and Strauss (2008). *Basics of qualitative research*. Third Edition . Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Cornet, E., Katz, R., Molloy, R., Schädler, J., Sharma, D. and Tipping, A., 2000. Customer solutions: From pilots to profits. *Booz Allen & Hamilton, New York*.
- Corsaro, D. and Snehota, I., 2010. Searching for relationship value in business markets: are we missing something?. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 39(6), pp.986-995.
- Cossío-Silva, F. J., Revilla-Camacho, M. Á., Vega-Vázquez, M. and Palacios-Florencio, B. (2016). Value co-creation and customer loyalty. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(5), pp. 1621–1625.
- Cova, B. and Salle, R. (2007). Introduction to the IMM special issue on “Project marketing and the marketing of solutions” A comprehensive approach to project marketing and the marketing of solutions. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 36(2), pp. 138–146.
- Coyne, I. T. (1997). Sampling in qualitative research. Purposeful and theoretical sampling; merging or clear boundaries?. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 26(3), pp. 623–630.
- Creswell, J. . (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Sage publications.
- Davies, A. (2004). Moving base into high-value integrated solutions: A value stream approach. *Industrial and Corporate Change*, 13(5), pp. 727–756.
- Davies, A., Brady, T. and Hobday, M. (2006). Charting a path toward integrated solutions.

Sloan Management Review, 43(7), pp. 39–48.

Davies, A., Brady, T. and Hobday, M. (2007). Organizing for solutions: Systems seller vs. systems integrator. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 36(2), pp. 183–193.

Day, G. S. (1990). *Market driven Strategy: Processes for creating value*. New York: The free press.

De Beuckelaer, A. and Wagner, S., 2007. Qualitative and quantitative international research: The issue of overlooking alternative explanations. *Journal of Purchasing and Supply management*, 13(3), pp.213-215.

Deighton, J. and Narayandas, D. (2004). Invited Commentaries on “Evolving to a New Dominant Logic for Marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 68(1), pp. 18-27.

deLeon, A. J. and Chatterjee, S. C. (2017). B2B relationship calculus: quantifying resource effects in service-dominant logic. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. 45(3), pp. 402–427.

De Vaus, D. A. (2001) Research design in social research. Sage Publications.

Dhar, R., Menon, A. and Maach, B. (2004). Toward Extending the Compromise Effect to Complex Buying Contexts. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 41(3), pp. 258–261.

Dubois, A. and Gadde, L. E. (2002). Systematic combining: An abductive approach to case research. *Journal of Business Research*, 55(7), pp. 553–560.

Dunn, D. and Thomas, C. (1994). Partnering with customers. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 9(1), pp. 34–40.

Dunn, Thomas and Lubawski (1981). Pitfalls of Consultative Selling. *Business Horizons*, 24(5), pp. 59–65.

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R. and Jackson, P.R., 2012. *Management research*. Sage.

Echeverri, P. and Skålén, P. (2011). Co-creation and co-destruction : A practice-theory based study of interactive value formation. *Marketing Theory*, 11(3), pp. 351–373.

Edvardsson, Tronvoll and Gruber (2011). Expanding understanding of service exchange and value co-creation: A social construction approach. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 39(2), pp. 327–339.

Eggert, A., Ulaga, W., Frow, P. and Payne, A. (2018). Conceptualizing and communicating

- value in business markets: From value in exchange to value in use. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 69, pp. 80–90.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building Theories from Case Study Research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), pp. 532–550.
- El-Said, H. and Harrigan, J. (2009). You Reap What You Plant: Social Networks in the Arab World-The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. *World Development*, 37(7), pp. 1235–1249.
- Eppen, G. ., Hanson, W. . and Martin, R. . (1991). Bundling - New Products, New Markets, Low risk. *Sloan Management Review*, 32(4), pp. 7–14.
- Evanschitzky, H., Wangenheim, F. V. and Woisetschläger, D. . (2011). Service & solution innovation: Overview and research agenda. *Industrial Marketing Management*. 40(5), pp. 657–660.
- Farquhar, J.D. and Robson, J., 2017. Selective demarketing: When customers destroy value. *Marketing Theory*, 17(2), pp.165-182.
- Feghali, E. (1997). Arab cultural communication patterns. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 21(3), pp. 345–378.
- Flowers, S., 2007. Organizational capabilities and technology acquisition: why firms know less than they buy. *Industrial and Corporate Change*, 16(3), pp.317-346.
- Foote, N. W., Galbraith, J., Hope, Q. and Miller, D. (2001). Making solution the answer. *The McKinsey Quarterly*, pp. 84–93.
- Frandsen, T., Boa, S. Ø. and Raja, J. Z. (2019). Pricing structures for solutions: an exploratory study within the oil and gas industry. *International Journal of Production Research*, pp.1-16
- Galbraith, J. R. (2002). Organizing to deliver solutions. *Organizational Dynamics*, 31(2), pp. 194–207.
- Ghauri, P. N. (2003). A framework for international business negotiations, in *International business negotiations*, 2(1) pp. 3–22.
- Giannakis, M., Doran, D. and Chen, S., 2012. The Chinese paradigm of global supplier relationships: Social control, formal interactions and the mediating role of culture. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 41(5), pp.831-840.

- Granot, E., Brashear, T.G. and Cesar Motta, P., 2012. A structural guide to in-depth interviewing in business and industrial marketing research. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 27(7), pp.547-553.
- Gronroos, C. (2011). Value co-creation in service logic: A critical analysis. *Marketing Theory*, 11(3), pp. 279–301.
- Gronroos, C. (2006). What can service logic offer marketing theory? In R. F. Lusch, & S. L. Vargo (Eds.), *The Service-dominant logic of marketing: Dialog, debate, and directions* (pp. 354–364). Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe.
- Grönroos, C. (1984). A service quality model and its marketing implications. *European Journal of Marketing*, 18(4), pp. 36–44.
- Grönroos, C. (2011). A service perspective on business relationships: The value creation, interaction and marketing interface. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 40(2), pp. 240–247.
- Grönroos, C. and Ravald, A. (2011). Service as business logic: implications for value creation and marketing. *Journal of Service Management*, 22(1), pp. 5–22.
- Grönroos, C. and Voima, P. (2013). Critical service logic: Making sense of value creation and co-creation. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 41(2), pp. 133–150.
- Guba and Lincoln (1994). *Competing paradigms in qualitative research. Handbook of qualitative research*.
- Guillemin, M. and Gillam, L., 2004. Ethics, reflexivity, and “ethically important moments” in research. *Qualitative inquiry*, 10(2), pp.261-280.
- Gummesson, E. (2003). All research is interpretive. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 18(6/7), pp. 482–492.
- Gummesson, E. (2006). Many-to-many marketing as grand theory. In Lusch, R. F., & Vargo, S. L. (eds), *The service-dominant logic of marketing: Dialog, debate, and directions* (pp. 339–353), Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe.
- Hakanen, T., 2014. Co-creating integrated solutions within business networks: The KAM team as knowledge integrator. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 43(7), pp.1195-1203.
- Hall, E. T. (1966). *The hidden dimension*. New York: Doubleday.

- Hannaford, W. J. (1976). Systems selling: Problems and benefits for buyers and sellers. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 5(2/3), pp. 139–145.
- Hax, A. and Wilde, D. (1999). The delta model: Adaptive management for a changing world. *Sloan Management Review*, 40(2), pp. 11–28.
- Hax, A. and Wilde, D. (2001). The Delta Model — Discovering new Sources of Profitability in a Networked Economy. *European Management Journal*, 19(4), pp. 379–391.
- Heinonen, K., Strandvik, T., Mickelsson, K. J., Edvardsson, B., Sundström, E. and Andersson, P. (2010). A customer-dominant logic of service. *Journal of Service Management*, 21(4), pp. 531–548.
- Helander, A. and Möller, K., 2008. How to become solution provider: System supplier's strategic tools. *Journal of Business-to-Business Marketing*, 15(3), pp.247-289.
- Hess, R. L., Ganesan, S. and Klein, N. M. (2003). Service failure and recovery: The impact of relationship factors on customer satisfaction. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 31(2), pp. 127–145.
- Hobday, M. (1998). Product complexity innovation and industrial organisation. *Research Policy*, 26(6), pp. 689–710.
- Hofstede, G. (1998) Attitudes, values and organizational culture: Disentangling the concepts. *Organization studies*, 19(3), pp. 477–493.
- Hofstede, G. H. (2001) *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations*. Second Edition. Sage Publications.
- Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind* (3rd. ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Holbrook, M. B. (1996). *Special Session Summary Customer Value. A Framework For Analysis and Research*, in *Advances in Consumer Research Volume 23*, eds. Kim P. Corfman and John G. Lynch Jr., Provo, UT : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 138-142.
- Holloway, I., 1997. *Basic concepts for qualitative research*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Hooker, J. (2009). Corruption from a cross-cultural perspective. *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal*, 16(3), pp. 251–267.
- Hooper, M. J., Steeple, D. and Winters, C. (2001). Costing customer value: an approach for

- the agile enterprise. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 21(5/6), pp. 630–644.
- Hudson, L. A. and Ozanne, J. L. (2002). Alternative Ways of Seeking Knowledge in Consumer Research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 14(4), pp. 508–521.
- Hult, G. T. M., Ketchen, D. J., Griffith, D. A., Finnegan, C. A., Gonzalez-Padron, T., Harmancioglu, N., Huang, Y., Talay, M. B. and Cavusgil, S. T. (2008). Data equivalence in cross-cultural international business research: Assessment and guidelines. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 39(6), pp. 1027–1044.
- Hunt, and Madhavaram, S. (2006). The Service -Dominant Logic of Marketing, Theoretical Foundations, Pedagogy, and Resource-Advantage Theory’, in *The service-dominant logic of marketing. The Service Dominant Logic of Marketing: Dialog, Debate and Directions*, pp. 67–84. Armonk: ME Sharpe.
- Hutchings, K. and Weir, D. (2006). Guanxi and wasta: A comparison. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 48(1), pp. 141–156.
- Hutchings, K. and Weir, D. (2006). Understanding networking in China and the Arab World Lessons for international managers. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 30(4), pp. 272–290.
- Jaakkola, E. and Alexander, M. (2014). The Role of Customer Engagement Behavior in Value Co-Creation: A Service System Perspective. *Journal of Service Research*, 17(3), pp. 247–261.
- Jaakkola, E. and Hakanen, T. (2013). Value co-creation in solution networks. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 42(1), pp. 47–58.
- Jacob, F. and Ulaga, W. (2008). The transition from product to service in business markets: An agenda for academic inquiry. *Industrial marketing management*, 37(3), pp. 247–253.
- Järvensivu, T. and Törnroos, J. Å. (2010). Case study research with moderate constructionism: Conceptualization and practical illustration. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 39(1), pp. 100–108.
- Järvi, H., Kähkönen, A. K. and Torvinen, H. (2018). When value co-creation fails: Reasons that lead to value co-destruction. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 34(1), pp. 63–77.

- Johns, G. (2006). The essential impact of context on organizational behavior. *Academy of Management Journal*, 31(2), pp. 386–408.
- Kauffman, R.J. and Tsai, J.Y., 2009. The unified procurement strategy for enterprise software: A test of the "move to the middle" hypothesis. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 26(2), pp.177-204.
- Keil, M. and Mähring, M., 2010. Is your project turning into a black hole?. *California Management Review*, 53(1), pp.6-31.
- Keränen, J. and Jalkala, A. (2013). Towards a framework of customer value assessment in B2B markets: An exploratory study. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 42(8), pp. 1307–1317.
- Khakhar, P. and Gulzar, H. (2013). Culture and business networks : International business negotiations with Arab managers. *International Business Review*, 22(3), pp. 578–590.
- Khalifa, A.S. (2004). Customer value: a review of recent literature and an integrative configuration. *Management Decision*, 42(5), PP. 645-666.
- Kindström, D. and Kowalkowski, C. (2009). Development of industrial service offerings: a process framework. *Journal of Service Management*, 20(2), pp. 156–172.
- Kim, Y., 2011. The pilot study in qualitative inquiry: Identifying issues and learning lessons for culturally competent research. *Qualitative Social Work*, 10(2), pp.190-206.
- King, and Brooks, J. M. (2016). *Template analysis for business and management students*. Sage Publications.
- King, N., Doing Template Analysis. *Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges*. Edited by: Symon G, Cassell C. 2012.
- Kleinaltenkamp, M., Brodie, R. J., Frow, P., Hughes, T., Peters, L. D. and Woratschek, H. (2012). Resource integration. *Marketing Theory*, 12(2), pp. 201–205.
- Kohtamäki, M. and Rajala, R. (2016). Theory and practice of value cocreation in b2b systems. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 56, pp. 4-13.
- Kotler, P. (2003) *Marketing Managment*. Prentice-Hall, Upper Saddle River, NJ.
- Kovács, G. and Spens, K. M. (2005). Abductive reasoning in logistics research. *International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management*, 35(2), pp. 132–144.

- Kowalkowski, C. (2008). *Managing the Industrial Service Function*. (Doctoral dissertation, Linköping University Electronic Press).
- Kowalkowski, C. (2011). Dynamics of value propositions: insights from service-dominant logic. *European Journal of Marketing*, 45(1/2), pp. 277–294.
- Kowalkowski, C., Gebauer, H. and Oliva, R. (2017). Service growth in product firms : Past , present , and future. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 60, pp. 82–88.
- Kowalkowski, C., Kindström, D. and Gebauer, H. (2013). ICT as a catalyst for service business orientation. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 28(6), pp. 506–513.
- Krishnamurthy, C., Johansson, J. and Schlissberg, H. (2003). Solutions selling: Is the pain worth the gain. 1(1), pp. 1–13.
- Laamanen, M. and Skålén, P. (2015). Collective – conflictual value co-creation : A strategic action field approach. *Marketing Theory*, 15(3), pp. 381–400.
- Lampel, J. and Mintzberg, H. (1996). Customizing customization. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 38(1), pp. 21-31.
- Lawless, M. W. (1991) ‘Commodity Bundling for Competitive Advantage: Strategic Implications’, *Journal of Management Studies*, 28(3), pp. 267–280.
- Leff Bonney, F. and Williams, B. (2009). From products to solutions: the role of salesperson opportunity recognition. *European Journal of Marketing*, 43(7/8), pp. 1032–1052.
- Leszinski, R. and Marn, M. V. (1997). Setting value, not price. *The McKinsey Quarterly*, (1), pp.98-116.
- Levitt, T. (1960). Marketing Myopia. *Harvard Business Review*., 82(7/8), pp.138-149.
- Lewis, M. (2006). Customer Acquisition Promotions and Customer Asset Value. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 43(2), pp. 195–203.
- Limaye, M.R. and Victor, D.A., 1991. Cross-cultural business communication research: State of the art and hypotheses for the 1990s. *The Journal of Business Communication* (1973), 28(3), pp.277-299.
- Lindgreen, A. and Wynstra, F. (2005). Value in business markets: What do we know? Where are we going?. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 34(7), pp. 732–748.
- Lusch and Vargo (2006a). Service-dominant logic: reactions, reflections and refinements.

Marketing Theory, 6(3), pp. 281–288.

Lusch and Vargo (2006b). *The Service-dominant Logic of Marketing: Dialog, Debate, and Directions*. M.E. Sharpe.

Lusch, R. F., and Vargo, S. L. (2014). *Service-dominant logic: Premises, perspectives, possibilities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Macdonald, E. K., Kleinaltenkamp, M. and Wilson, H. N. (2016). How business customers judge solutions: Solution quality and value-in-use. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(3), pp. 96–120.

Macdonald, E.K., Wilson, H., Martinez, V. and Toossi, A., 2011. Assessing value-in-use: A conceptual framework and exploratory study. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 40(5), pp.671-682.

Makkonen, H. and Olkkonen, R., 2017. Interactive value formation in interorganizational relationships: Dynamic interchange between value co-creation, no-creation, and co-destruction. *Marketing Theory*, 17(4), pp.517-535.

Marcos Cuevas, J. (2018). The transformation of professional selling: Implications for leading the modern sales organization. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 96, pp. 198-208.

Matthyssens, P. and Vandenbempt, K. (1998). Creating competitive advantage in industrial services. *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, 13(4/5), pp. 339–355.

Matthyssens, P. and Vandenbempt, K. (2008). Moving from basic offerings to value-added solutions: Strategies, barriers and alignment. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 37(3), pp. 316–328.

Mattsson, L.G. (1973). Systems selling as a strategy on industrial markets. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 3(2), pp. 107–120.

Mascarenhas, O.A., Kesavan, R. and Bernacchi, M., 2008. Buyer–seller information asymmetry: Challenges to distributive and corrective justice. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 28(1), pp.68-84.

McKiernan, P. (2006). Understanding Environmental Context in Strategic Management. *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 36(3), pp. 3–6.

Miles, I., Kastrinos, N., Flanagan, K., Bilderbeek, R., Den Hertog, P., Huntink, W. and Bouman, M., 1995. Knowledge-intensive business services. *EIMS publication*, 15,

pp.25-90.

- Miller, D., Hope, Q., Eisenstat, R., Foote, N. and Galbraith, J. (2002). The problem of solutions: Balancing clients and capabilities. *Business Horizons*, 45(2), pp. 3–12.
- Milliken, J. (2001). Qualitative research and marketing management. *Management Decision*, 39(1), pp. 71–78.
- Mitchell, V.W., 1994. Using industrial key informants: Some guidelines. *Market Research Society. Journal.*, 36(2), pp.1-5.
- Mohamed, A.A. and Mohamad, M.S., 2011. The effect of wasta on perceived competence and morality in Egypt. *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal*, 18(4), pp.412-425.
- Möller, K.K. and Törrönen, P., 2003. Business suppliers' value creation potential: A capability-based analysis. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 32(2), pp.109-118.
- Morgan, G. and Smircich, L. (1980). The Case for Qualitative Research. *Academy of Management Review*, 5(4), pp. 491–500.
- Mustak, M. (2017) Customer participation in knowledge intensive business services: Perceived value outcomes from a dyadic perspective. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 78, pp. 76-87.
- Myers, M. . (2009). *Qualitative research in business and management*. 1st editio. Sage Publications.
- Myers, M. D. and Newman, M. (2007). The qualitative interview in IS research: Examining the craft. *Information and Organization*, 17(1), pp. 2–26.
- Nelson, G. L., Batal, M. Al and Bakary, W. El (2002) ‘Directness vs. indirectness: Egyptian Arabic and US English communication style’, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 26(1), pp. 39–57.
- Ng, I. C. L. and Smith, L. A. (2012). An integrative framework of value. In Special issue—Toward a better understanding of the role of value in markets and marketing pp. 207–243. Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Nordin, F. and Kowalkowski, C. (2010). Solutions offerings: A critical review and reconceptualisation. *Journal of Service Management*, 21(4), pp. 441–459.
- Normann, R. and Ramirez, R., 1993. From value chain to value constellation: Designing

- interactive strategy. *Harvard business review*, 71(4), pp.65-77.
- Oliva, R. and Kallenberg, R., 2003. Managing the transition from products to services. *International journal of service industry management*, 14(2), pp.160-172.
- Osborne, S. P. (2018). From public service-dominant logic to public service logic: are public service organizations capable of co-production and value co-creation?. *Public Management Review*. Routledge, 20(2), pp. 225–231.
- Ostrom, A.L., Bitner, M.J., Brown, S.W., Burkhard, K.A., Goul, M., Smith-Daniels, V., Demirkan, H. and Rabinovich, E., 2010. Moving forward and making a difference: research priorities for the science of service. *Journal of service research*, 13(1), pp.4-36.
- Ostrom, A. L., Parasuraman, A., Bowen, D. E. and Voss, C. A. (2015). Service Research Priorities in a Rapidly Changing Context. *Journal of Service Research*, 18(2), pp. 127–159.
- Oxford Business Group (2015). Expansion of Jordan's ICT sector remains a government priority. Available at <https://www.oxfordbusinessgroup.com/overview/dynamic-market-private-sector-ambitions-rising-internet-penetration-and-shift-4g-are-tran-0> [Accessed: 10th December 2016].
- Page, A. L. and Siemplenski, M. (1983). Product systems marketing. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 12, pp. 89–99.
- Paliwoda, S. J. and Bonaccorsi, A. J. (1993). Systems selling in the aircraft industry. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 22, pp. 155–160.
- Panagopoulos, N.G., Rapp, A.A. and Ogilvie, J.L., 2017. Salesperson solution involvement and sales performance: The contingent role of supplier firm and customer–supplier relationship characteristics. *Journal of Marketing*, 81(4), pp.144-164.
- Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A. and Berry, L. . (1985). A conceptual model of service quality and its implications for future research. *Journal of Marketing*, 49(4), pp. 41–50.
- Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. SAGE Publications.
- Paun, D. (1993). When to bundle or unbundle products. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 22(1), pp. 29–34.

- Payne, A. F., Storbacka, K. and Frow, P. (2008). Managing the co-creation of value. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 36(1), pp. 83–96.
- Payne, A. and Frow, P. (2014). Developing superior value propositions: A strategic marketing imperative. *Journal of Service Management*, 25(2), pp. 213–227.
- Penttinen, E. and Palmer, J. (2007). Improving firm positioning through enhanced offerings and buyer-seller relationships. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 36(5), pp. 552–564.
- Petri, J. and Jacob, F. (2016). The Customer as Enabler of Value Co-Creation in the Solution Business. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 56, pp.63-72.
- Pinho, N., Beirão, G., Patrício, L. and Fisk, R. (2014). Understanding value co-creation in complex services with many actors. *Journal of Service Research*, 25(4), pp. 470–493.
- Plé, L. (2017). Why Do We Need Research on Value Co-destruction?. *Journal of Creating Value*, 3(2), pp.162-169.
- Plé, L. and Chumpitaz Cáceres, R. (2010). Not always co-creation : Introducing interactional co-destruction of value in service-dominant logic. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 24(6), pp. 430–437.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (2005). Language and meaning: Data collection in qualitative research. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), pp. 137–145.
- Porter, M.E., 2008. *Competitive advantage: Creating and sustaining superior performance*. Simon and Schuster.
- Poulis, K., Poulis, E. and Plakoyiannaki, E. (2013). The role of context in case study selection: An international business perspective. *International Business Review*, 22(1), pp. 304–314.
- Powers, T. L., Sheng, S. and Juan, J. (2016). Provider and relational determinants of customer solution performance. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 56, pp.14-23.
- Prahalad, C. K. and Ramaswamy, V. (2004). Co-creation experiences: The next practice in value creation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(3), pp. 5–14.
- Prior, D.D., 2013. Supplier representative activities and customer perceived value in complex industrial solutions. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 42(8), pp.1192-1201.
- Prior, D.D. (2015) ‘Boundary spanning and customer service styles in business solutions

- implementation', *Industrial Marketing Management*, 56, pp.120-129.
- Prior, D.D., 2016. The impact of service worker personal resources on relationship quality in business solutions. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 53, pp.216-225.
- Prior, D.D. and Marcos-cuevas, J. (2016). Value co-destruction in interfirm relationships: The impact of actor engagement styles. *Marketing Theory*, 16(4), pp. 533–552.
- Quach, S. and Thaichon, P., 2017. From connoisseur luxury to mass luxury: Value co-creation and co-destruction in the online environment. *Journal of Business Research*, 81, pp.163-172.
- Raja, J.Z., Bourne, D., Goffin, K., Çakkol, M. and Martinez, V., 2013. Achieving customer satisfaction through integrated products and services: An exploratory study. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 30(6), pp.1128-1144.
- Ramaswamy, V. and Ozcan, K., 2018. What is co-creation? An interactional creation framework and its implications for value creation. *Journal of Business Research*, 84, pp.196-205.
- Rangan, V.K. and Bowman, G.T., 1992. Beating the commodity magnet. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 21(3), pp.215-224.
- Rice, G. (1999). Islamic Ethics and the Implications for Business. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 18(4), pp. 345–358.
- Richman, W. L., Kiesler, S., Weisband, S. and Drasgow, F. (1999). A meta-analytic study of social desirability distortion in computer-administered questionnaires, traditional questionnaires, and interviews. *Journal of applied psychology*, 84(5), pp. 754–775.
- Robson, C., (2002). *Real world research*, Oxford.
- Roehrich, J. K. and Caldwell, N. D. (2012). Delivering integrated solutions in the public sector: The unbundling paradox. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 41(6), pp. 995–1007.
- Rubin, H. J. and Rubin, I. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Sage Publications.
- Rust, R. (1998). What is the Domain of Service Research. *Journal of Service Research*, 1(2), p. 107.
- Ryan, A., Tähtinen, J., Vanharanta, M. and Mainela, T. (2012). Putting critical realism to work

- in the study of business relationship processes. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 41(2), pp. 300–311.
- Saarijärvi, H., Kannan, P.K. and Kuusela, H., 2013. Value co-creation: theoretical approaches and practical implications. *European Business Review*, 25(1), pp.6-19.
- Santos, J.B. and Spring, M., 2015. Are knowledge intensive business services really co-produced? Overcoming lack of customer participation in KIBS. *Industrial marketing management*, 50, pp.85-96.
- Saunders, M. ., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2012). *Research methods for business students*. Sixth Edition. Pearson Education India.
- Sawhney, M. (2006). *Going beyond the product, defining, designing and delivering customer solutions*. In R. Lush, & S. Vargo (Eds.), *The service-dominant logic of marketing: Dialog, debate and directions* (pp. 365-380). New York: M.E. Sharpe.
- Schmalensee, R., 1984. Gaussian demand and commodity bundling. *Journal of business*, pp.S211-S230.
- Schaarschmidt, M., Walsh, G. and Evanschitzky, H., 2018. Customer interaction and innovation in hybrid offerings: Investigating moderation and mediation effects for goods and services innovation. *Journal of Service Research*, 21(1), pp.119-134.
- Sharfman, M. (1998). On the advisability of using CEOs as the sole informant in strategy research. *Journal of Managerial Issues*, p. 373–392.
- Sharma, A. and Iyer, G. R. (2011). Are pricing policies an impediment to the success of customer solutions?’, *Industrial Marketing Management*, 40(5), pp. 723–729.
- Sharma, D. and Molloy, R. (1999). The truth about customer solutions. *Booz Allen Hamilton New York NY*, p. 16.
- Sharma, D., Lucier, C. and Molloy, R., 2002. From solutions to symbiosis: Blending with your customers. *Strategy and Business*, pp.38-43.
- Sharma, A. and Syam, N., 2018. Sales and customer development: An agenda for inquiry. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 69, pp.133-134.
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22(2), pp. 63–75.
- Shepherd, C. and Ahmed, P. K. (2000). From product innovation to solutions innovation: a

- new paradigm for competitive advantage. *European Journal of Innovation Management*, 3(2), pp. 100–106.
- Sheth, J.N. and Parvatiyar, A., 2000. *Handbook of relationship marketing*. Sage.
- Sjödin, D. R., Parida, V. and Wincent, J. (2016). Value co-creation process of integrated product-services: Effect of role ambiguities and relational coping strategies. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 55, pp. 108-119.
- Skarp, F. and Gadde, L. E. (2008). Problem solving in the upgrading of product offerings : A case study from the steel industry. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 37(6), pp. 725–737.
- Skålén, P., Gummerus, J., von Koskull, C. and Magnusson, P.R., 2015. Exploring value propositions and service innovation: a service-dominant logic study. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 43(2), pp.137-158.
- Smith, A. M. (2013). The value co-destruction process : A customer resource perspective. *European Journal of Marketing*, 4 (11/12), pp. 1889–1909.
- Smith, L., Maull, R. and CL Ng, I. (2014). Servitization and operations management: a service dominant-logic approach. *International Journal of Operations & Production Management*, 34(2), pp. 242–269.
- Soares, A. M., Farhangmehr, M. and Shoham, A. (2007). Hofstede's dimensions of culture in international marketing studies. *Journal of Business Research*, 60(3), pp. 277–284.
- Storbacka, K. (2011). A solution business model: Capabilities and management practices for integrated solutions. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 40(5), pp. 699–711.
- Storbacka, K. and Pennanen, R. (2014). *Solution business: Building a platform for organic growth*. Springer International Publishing.
- Storbacka, K., Windahl, C., Nenonen, S. and Salonen, A. (2013). Solution business models: Transformation along four continua. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 42(5), pp. 705–716.
- Stremersch, S. and Tellis, G. J. (2002). Strategic Bundling of Products and Prices: A New Synthesis for Marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 66(1), pp. 55–72.
- Stremersch, S., Wuyts, S. and Frambach, R. T. (2001). The Purchasing of Full-Service Contracts: An Exploratory Study within the Industrial Maintenance Market. *Industrial*

Marketing Management, 30(1), pp. 1–12.

Suddaby, R. O. Y. (2006). From the Editors: What grounded theory is not. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(4), pp. 633–642.

Tax, S. S. and Brown, S. W. (1998). Recovering and Learning from Service Failure. *Sloan Management Review*, 40(1), p. 75–88.

Temple, B., 2002. Crossed wires: Interpreters, translators, and bilingual workers in cross-language research. *Qualitative health research*, 12(6), pp.844-854.

Temple, B. and Young, A., 2004. Qualitative research and translation dilemmas. *Qualitative research*, 4(2), pp.161-178.

The World Bank, Jordan economic monitor, Spring 2013, http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/MNA/Jordan_EM_Spring_2013.pdf [Accessed: 30th July, 2017].

Töllner, A., Blut, M. and Holzmüller, H. H. (2011). Customer solutions in the capital goods industry: Examining the impact of the buying center', *Industrial Marketing Management*, 40(5), pp. 712–722.

Töytäri, P. and Rajala, R. (2015). Value-based selling: An organizational capability perspective. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 45, pp. 101–112.

Tronvoll, B., Brown, S.W., Gremler, D.D. and Edvardsson, B., 2011. Paradigms in service research. *Journal of Service Management*, 22(5), pp.560-585.

Tsang, E.W., 1998. Inside story: Mind your identity when conducting cross national research. *Organization studies*, 19(3), pp.511-515.

Tuli, K. R., Kohli, A. K. and Bharadwaj, S. G. (2007). Rethinking Customer Solutions: From Product Bundles to Relational Processes. *Journal of Marketing*, 71(3), pp. 1–17.

Uлага, W. and Eggert, A., 2006. Relationship value and relationship quality: Broadening the nomological network of business-to-business relationships. *European Journal of marketing*, 40(3/4), pp.311-327.

Uлага, W. and Kohli, A.K., 2018. The role of a solutions salesperson: Reducing uncertainty and fostering adaptiveness. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 69, pp.161-168.

Uлага, W. and Reinartz, W. (2011). Hybrid offerings: How manufacturing firms combine goods and services successfully. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(6), pp. 5–23.

- Vafeas, M., Hughes, T. and Hilton, T., 2016. Antecedents to value diminution: A dyadic perspective. *Marketing Theory*, 16(4), pp.469-491.
- Valtakoski, A. (2015). Initiation of buyer-seller relationships: The impact of intangibility, trust and mitigation strategies. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 44, pp. 107–118.
- Vandermerwe, S. and Rada, J., 1988. Servitization of business: adding value by adding services. *European management journal*, 6(4), pp.314-324.
- Vargo, S. L. and Lusch, R. F. (2004a) ‘Evolving to a New Dominant Logic for Marketing’, *Journal of Marketing*, 68(1), pp. 1–17.
- Vargo, S. L. and Lusch, R. F. (2004b). The Four Service Marketing Myths: Remnants of a Goods-Based, Manufacturing Model. *Journal of Service Research*, 6(4), pp. 324–335.
- Vargo, S. L. and Lusch, R. F. (2008a) ‘From goods to service(s): Divergences and convergences of logics. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 37(3), pp. 254–259.
- Vargo, S. L. and Lusch, R. F. (2008b). Service-dominant logic: continuing the evolution. *Journal of the Academy of marketing Science*, 36(1), pp. 1–10.
- Vargo, S. L. and Lusch, R. F. (2016). Institutions and axioms: an extension and update of service-dominant logic. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 44(1), pp. 5–23.
- Vargo, S. L., Maglio, P. P. and Akaka, M. A. (2008). On value and value co-creation: A service systems and service logic perspective. *European Management Journal*, 26(3), pp. 145–152.
- Vargo, S. L. and Morgan, F. (2005). Services in Society and Academic Thought: An Historical Analysis’, *Journal of Macromarketing*, 25(1), pp. 42–53.
- Vega-Vazquez, M., Revilla-Camacho, M. Á. and Cossío-Silva, F. J. (2013). The value co-creation process as a determinant of customer satisfaction. *Management Decision*, 51(10), pp. 1945–1953.
- Wagner, S.M., Lukassen, P. and Mahlendorf, M., 2010. Misused and missed use—Grounded theory and objective hermeneutics as methods for research in industrial marketing. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 39(1), pp.5-15.
- Webster, F. (1992). The Changing Role of Marketing in the Corporation. *Journal of marketing*, 56, pp. 1–17.

- Webster Jr, F.E. and Wind, Y., 1972. A general model for understanding organizational buying behavior. *Journal of marketing*, 36(2), pp.12-19.
- Welch, C. and Piekkari, R., 2006. Crossing language boundaries: Qualitative interviewing in international business. *Management International Review*, 46(4), pp.417-437.
- Wilson, E.J. and Lilien, G.L., 1992. Using single informants to study group choice: an examination of research practice in organizational buying. *Marketing Letters*, 3(3), pp.297-305.
- Windahl, C., Andersson, P., Berggren, C. and Nehler, C. (2004). Manufacturing firms and integrated solutions: characteristics and implications. *European Journal of Innovation Management*, 7(3), pp. 218–228.
- Windahl, C. and Lakemond, N. (2006). Developing integrated solutions: The importance of relationships within the network. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 35(7), pp. 806–818.
- Windler, K., Jüttner, U., Michel, S., Maklan, S. and Macdonald, E. K. (2016) Identifying the right solution customers: A managerial methodology. *Industrial Marketing Management*. 60, pp. 173–186.
- Woodruff, R. B. (1997). Customer value: The next source for competitive advantage. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 25(2), pp. 139–153.
- Woodruff, R. and Flint, D. (2006). *Marketing's service-dominant logic and customer value*, *In the service-dominant logic of marketing: Dialog, debate, and directions*, edited by R. Lush and S. Vargo, 183-195. M.E. Shape.
- Worm, S., Bharadwaj, S.G., Ulaga, W. and Reinartz, W.J., 2017. When and why do customer solutions pay off in business markets?. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 45(4), pp.490-512.
- Wotruba, T. R. (1980). The Changing Character of Industrial Selling. *European Journal of Marketing*, 14(5/6), pp. 293–302.
- Wotruba, T.R., 1991. The evolution of personal selling. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 11(3), pp.1-12.
- Youngdahl, W. E., Kellogg, D. L., Nie, W. and Bowen, D. E. (2003). Revisiting customer participation in service encounters: Does culture matter?. *Journal of Opeartions*

Managmnet, 21(1), pp. 109–120.

Zaharna, R.S., 1995. Understanding cultural preferences of Arab communication patterns. *Public Relations Review*, 21(3), pp.241-255.

Zahra, S. A. (2007). Contextualizing theory building in entrepreneurship research. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 22(3), pp. 443–452.

Zeithaml, V.A., 1988. Consumer perceptions of price, quality, and value: a means-end model and synthesis of evidence. *Journal of marketing*, 52(3), pp.2-22.

Zeithaml, V. A., Parasuraman, A. and Berry, L. L. (1985) Problems and Strategies in Services Marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 49, pp. 33–46.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guide

- ✓ Background information on the interviewee (for customer and supplier firms)
- Name of the organisation, size of the organisation
- Title of the interviewee, interviewee's role in the organisation

A) Questions to Suppliers

- How do you understand the customer solutions concept?
- How are solutions different from stand-alone goods/services?
- What types of solution offerings does your company offer?
- To what extent are these solutions customised/standardised?
- Describe offering customer solutions in the Jordanian market compared to other international markets.
- What are the marketing activities involved in selling customer solutions?
- Do you sell the same solutions to all types of business buyers?
- What are the main target groups/customers?
- How do marketing and selling activities differ by different customer group?
- Do you agree with the defined customer solution process?
- How does your firm interact with its customer?
- Describe your roles and customer roles in the interactive process?
- What type of resources should the customer have to deliver effective solutions?
- Do you encounter any challenges when you offer customer solutions? Please describe?
- What do you expect from the customer in the customer solution process?
- What do you perceive as actions that cause negative experience during the collaboration with your customer?

B) Questions to Customers

- How do you understand the customer solutions concept?
- Could you describe the solution offering you bought recently?
- Why did you need that solution? What was the problem you had?
- Describe your experience in that solution prior to the purchasing process.
- How do you make your decision to buy a solution?
- Does it take a long time before you decide on a certain supplier?
- What factors do you consider before choosing a certain supplier?
- How do you understand your roles and supplier roles in the customer solution process?
- What do you expect from the supplier in the customer solution process?
- What are challenges you encounter when you buy a customer solution?
- What do you perceive as actions that cause negative experience during the collaboration with your supplier?

Appendix 2: Initial Template

1 Customer readiness

- 1.1 Customers' inability to operate effectively in solutions markets
- 1.2 Customers' focus on purchasing price

2 Solutions marketing challenges

- 2.1 Customer resistance to technology-based solutions
- 2.2 Sharing inaccurate information during the co-creation

3 Solutions offerings

- 3.1 Highly standardised offerings
- 3.2 Offerings communicated to large business customers
- 3.3 Offerings communicated to smaller customers

4 Solutions value co-creation phases

- 4.1 Customer education
- 4.2 Value demonstration
- 4.3 Problem and need definition
- 4.4 Signalling activities
 - 4.4.1 The influence of *wasta* connections on choosing suppliers
- 4.5 Requirements definition
- 4.6 Customisation and integration
- 4.7 Deployment
- 4.8 Post-deployment

5 Drivers of value co-destruction

- 5.1 Resources deficiency
 - 5.1.1 Lack of customer expertise
- 5.2 Resources misuse
 - 5.2.1 Solutions misuse
- 5.3 Inappropriate practices

Appendix 3: Final Template

1 Low customer readiness solutions market

1.1 Customer inability to effectively operate within solutions market

- Customers' emphasis on value in-exchange over value in-use
- Customers' limitations in organising and planning their resources
- Customers' limitations in utilising solutions value-in-use

2 Provider's roles to support customer value creation

2.1 Market development

2.1.1 Customer education (the role of solutions knowledge provider)

2.1.2 Value demonstration (the role of value demonstrator)

2.2 Requirements definition (the role of customer resources organiser)

2.3 Solution deployment and post-deployment (the role of value-in-use enabler)

3 Multiple solution value proposition approach

3.1 Strategic solution value proposition (e.g., on premise solutions)

- Targeted and communicated to large business customers
- Characterised with long sales cycles
- Involve intense co-creation activities

3.2 Transactional solutions value propositions (e.g., pay-per-use offerings)

- Targeted and communicated to smaller customers
- Characterised with short sales cycles
- Involve minimal co-creation activities

4 Impact of Arabian business culture on customer solutions process

4.1 The influence of *wasta* connections and interpersonal relationships

4.2 Arab buyer's treatment of time

4.3 The involvement of the senior management team of supplier firms

5 Drivers of experiencing suboptimal value

5.1 Customers' and providers' practices that contribute to destroying value co-creation experiences:

- Relying on *wasta* when choosing a solution supplier
- Unwillingness to share accurate information
- Issues related to technology solutions adoption
- Lack of operant resources
- Inadequate understanding of solutions contracts
- Customer contact person related issues
- Time constraints

Appendix 4: Ethical approval obtained to carry out this research

United Kingdom | Dubai | Malaysia



12 July 2016

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

<u>Name</u>	Mr SAMER WAE'L ABDEL LATIF HAMADNEH
<u>Registration No</u>	H00208142
<u>Date of Birth</u>	11-OCT-1987
<u>Course of Study</u>	PhD (Management)
<u>School/Institute</u>	School of Management & Languages
<u>Start date</u>	14-SEP-2015
<u>Expected end date</u>	12-SEP-2018

This is to certify that the above named is a full-time matriculated postgraduate student of this University in the academic year 2015-16.

In line with School policy, Mr Hamadneh was required to obtain ethical approval relating to his project **"Marketing customer solutions in the context of Business to Business in Jordan"** (previously entitled, *"The non-integrated service solutions paradox (Developing country perspective)"*). Mr Hamadneh's ethics application was submitted and reviewed by the School's Ethics Officer in June 2016 and received Full Approval.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'K. Sang'.

Dr K Sang
PGR Co-ordinator (Business Management)
School of Management and Languages
Heriot-Watt University
Edinburgh EH14 4AS
United Kingdom
K.Sang@hw.ac.uk

School of Management
& Languages
Heriot Watt University
Edinburgh
EH14 4AS
UK

School of Management and Languages

Enze Farburn Building, Unit 12, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, EH14 4AS, United Kingdom
Telephone: +44 (0)131 451 3357 Fax: +44 (0)131 451 3396 www.smh.wa.ac.uk

Heriot-Watt University is a Charity registered in Scotland, No 0065296

Appendix 5

Copy of letter which was sent to customer and supplier firms to gain access



Date: 1st July 2016

Request for permission to conduct research

To whom it may concern,

This letter is to confirm that Samer Hamadneh (ID H00208142, email: swh1@hw.ac.uk), is a first year PhD student at Heriot-Watt University, Scotland, UK. Samer is funded by the marketing department of the University of Jordan. The title of his research is 'Marketing customer solutions in the context of Business to Business in Jordan'. As part of his research, the university requests permission to collect data from relevant firms. The research project seeks to understand how solutions are communicated, marketed and bought. Data will be collected through interviews. All responses will be made anonymous ensuring absolute confidentiality for participants. The university has granted full Ethics Approval for this research.

The data collection will be based on two stages:

1. Pilot study will be conducted in Jordan between 10/07/2016 – 20/08/2016.
2. The major data collection will be the next phase in 2017.

We believe that this research will make a valuable and practical contribution to the business community in Jordan and will help solutions providers to plan, market, and communicate their solution offerings effectively.

Thanking you for your cooperation,

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Nigel Caldwell'.

Dr Nigel Caldwell

*Director of the Logistics Research Centre,
Associate Professor in Management*

School of Management and Languages

Heriot-Watt University

Email: n.d.caldwell@hw.ac.uk

Web page: <https://www.hw.ac.uk/schools/management-languages/staff-directory/nigel-caldwell.htm>

School of Management and Languages

Mary Burton Building Gait 11 Heriot-Watt University Edinburgh EH14 4AS United Kingdom
Telephone +44 (0)131 451 3863 Fax +44 (0)131 451 3296 Email enquiries@sm.l.hw.ac.uk www.sm.l.hw.ac.uk

Edinburgh Campus • Scottish Borders Campus • Orkney Campus • Dubai Campus

Heriot-Watt University is a Charity registered in Scotland SC003276